

**Apocalypse
Bringer
Mynoghra: World
Conquest Starts**

Fehu Kazuno

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APOCALYPSE BRINGER MYNOGHRA

-WORLD CONQUEST STARTS WITH THE CIVILIZATION OF RUIN-

Author: Fehu Kazuno

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of Ruin, Volume 1
Fehu Kazuno

Translation by Charis Messier

Illustration by Jun

Title Design by A.M. Perrone

Editing by Tom Speelman

Proofreading by A.M. Perrone

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contact@crossinfworld.com

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Chapter 1: New Game

...*I'M* dead.

Those were Takuto Ira's final thoughts.

Darkness had consumed his consciousness and he'd long since lost control of his senses. Telling people he had an incurable disease sounded nice and dramatic, but it did nothing to help him accept a meaningless life confined to bed. Dying at just eighteen sucked, to say the least, but surprisingly, Takuto was at peace with his fate.

He was content with the years he'd lived and grateful for the miracle that introduced him to a game that he'd become so passionate about these last few years, it'd made his doctors and nurses worry.

He had so much more to say, but Takuto died satisfied with his life.

Or...so he thought.

"...Huh. Is *this* the afterlife? It's kinda chilly."

His consciousness sparked back to life.

Takuto opened his eyes to see greenery all around him. Shafts of sunlight spilled through the trees towering overhead.

His back was resting against something hard. He ran his hand over its smooth, solid surface and inferred it was some kind of stone dais. While he was still wearing the hospital gown he'd spent the better part of his life in, those burdensome IV bags and needles and ventilator mask were gone.

Heck; he felt healthier than ever.

"Haha! The air is so fresh."

Cool air filled his lungs when he took a deep breath, and the vibrant green landscape sprawling in front of him prevailed over his memories of that suffocating hospital room.

Takuto was convinced this was the afterlife now that his illness-addled body felt as light as a feather. Just moving a finger had been a herculean task before he died.

"Have you awoken, my lord?"

Someone suddenly spoke to him as he patted down his body to ensure everything was in its proper place.

If his guess was right, the respectful voice belonged to a girl. Maybe she was an angel like he'd read about in stories. Sure, it was a ridiculous presupposition, but the impossible had already set in when he'd become self-aware after death.

I can't be rude if she's an angel here to guide me through the afterlife.

Takuto hastily straightened out his hospital gown and looked up in the direction of the speaker.

But the true impossibility was the girl herself.

Wait, what? What's going on here?

Could his shock even be measured? No matter how many times he blinked and rubbed his eyes, the sight before him stayed the same. The girl stood there, silently waiting for him to come to grips with his inner turmoil, as if she knew what he was thinking.

Mousy white hair, somewhat like ashes, bore striking contrast against her jet-black dress. Gold accessories accentuating different sections of her body twisted in ways that seemed to defy the laws of physics, yet worked in perfect harmony. More than anything else, it was the fathomless depths of her inhuman eyes that confirmed her identity.

Takuto knew the girl. Not only did he know her, but she was the one thing he wouldn't forget, even if he died.

She was one of the Hero units from the dark fantasy empire-management strategy game Takuto had played unceasingly throughout his illness: *Eternal Nations*.

"Could it be you...Atou?"

"Yes, my king."

He could *never* forget his favorite character from the game he'd played to his death.

Whether she intuited his bewilderment or not, the girl called Atou answered him with a soft smile and a gracious bow.

"King...?"

Takuto was overcome by a slight sense of uneasiness and a wave of confusion. He didn't have enough time to figure out what was happening to him, but the one thing he did understand was that she was showing him respect. He didn't want to disappoint.

Disappointing a character from his favorite game was the last thing he wanted to do. It was nothing more than vanity, but to the

boy who'd lived knowing only the walls of a hospital room, not upsetting her meant everything to him.

Coming across as pathetic wasn't an option.

If she views me as a king, then I must act the part.

Such thoughts hewed more toward deep-rooted delusion than sound thinking, but they quickly became Takuto's conviction and the most important thing for him to achieve.

H-How do I do that though?! Roleplay?! If she thinks I'm a king, then I think that means I've become Mynoghra's commander... Maybe I just have to act like one? But how?!

"Hehe..."

"...?"

Her soft laughter caused his heart to throb painfully. If Takuto had been in the hospital, a team of doctors and nurses would be racing into his room about now. Fortunately, his current body didn't fall apart that easily. Not that it did anything to help him understand the meaning behind the girl's smile either.

"It's all right, King Takuto."

Her gentle words were enough to diffuse the tension. But the next thing she said shocked him even more.

"You are the legendary player Takuto Ira! Renowned for being the first player to clear Nightmare Difficulty while playing as the hardest civilization, Mynoghra the Civilization of Ruin. Your brilliant strategies had you shining at the top of the official leaderboards!"

"H-How do you *know* that?!"

That was the legacy Takuto had left behind.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that he'd spent most of his life in the hospital. He'd rarely had a moment to rest between all the tests and medications he'd undergone every day. His family was wealthy, but his parents didn't seem to care about their sickly son. By the time they'd pushed him out of their minds, keeping their visits to the bare minimum, isolation had become his way of life.

But in his loneliness, he discovered his one joy in life: the 4x strategy game *Eternal Nations*. It was a turn-based game set in a dark fantasy world where players could play as various races and civilizations in their quest to conquer the world. A single playthrough requiring over a dozen hours made it an oddly ideal match for Takuto's lifestyle.

He'd become so enthralled with the game, he'd eventually

forgot all about his isolation—or rather, it left him no time to think about it. And then he'd made it onto the leaderboard, where he'd become so renowned, any player who took ranking seriously knew his name.

Indeed, Takuto's greatest accomplishment that he'd prided himself on was clearing *Eternal Nation's* Nightmare Difficulty, which was said to be unwinnable, with the hardest to use civilization, Mynoghra. He became a legend among players with his use of the unit called Atou—AKA the girl standing before him.

"I remember everything too."

Her pithy remark cleared all of Takuto's doubts—except for those concerned with the surrealness of the situation.

"I remember every word you said to me in all the times we conquered the world together. And after each 'Game Over,' King Takuto."

At first, her tone came across as flat, but he could sense the emotion behind her words.

She probably feels the same way I do.

Every part of him was deeply moved.

"Please set your mind at ease. I remember everything about you, King Takuto."

Takuto felt the corners of his eyes grow hot. Maybe he was crying without realizing it. He wanted to say something impressive, but in his current frazzled state, he could only manage to hoarsely express himself.

"Using you—using Atou—was my policy and playstyle."

"Yes, I was pleased to always join you for campaigns."

Atou was a Hero unit full of countless possibilities.

Each civilization had its own unique, powerful unit called a Hero unit. Mynoghra's Hero unit, Atou, had the frustrating trait of being the weakest unit early in the game. On the flip side, she also had the ability to grow into the strongest unit of all. As someone who'd pined after the outside world, freedom, potential, and the future, it was easy to see why Takuto became attached to her.

"I think I always wanted to be like you because...I was born with a weak body."

"Your stories broadened my horizons, King Takuto."

"It's...kinda embarrassing to learn you were listening all those times that I was talking to you on the other side of the screen."

"I was always waiting for you to talk to me."

“...I’m happy to finally speak to you in person.”

“It’s more than I could have ever hoped for to do the same, King Takuto.”

Their conversation flowed more like they were old friends rather than two people who’d just met in person for the first time. Then again, while their dynamic was different, the trust between them had been fostered over many years.

Takuto was reveling in this unexpected, happy development when he began to wonder if such miracles were a common in the afterlife, which brought up a whole slew of questions.

“Is this...heaven?” he asked suddenly. “Did you summon me here?”

“No. I did not. I suddenly found myself here, too. And if I had to guess, this isn’t quite heaven either. If anything, it feels like my world: *Eternal Nations*.”

Atou looked over their surroundings before shaking her head slightly. From just that gesture, Takuto intuited she wasn’t lying.

“So, it’s an unknown world...” he muttered. Atou nodded once, which told him pretty much all he needed to know.

“Would it be cliché...to call this a miracle? But I don’t mind sounding clichéd. I’m just so happy to have met you, King Takuto.”

Takuto nodded to show he felt the same. Confusion dominated his thoughts, but being able to chat with Atou was nothing short of bliss.

But I can’t let the joy blind me, Takuto thought with the sliver of calm he still had left.

It took everything he’d had in him just to make it through the day before he died, but he was free of those bodily restrictions now.

I guess I need an objective for this...new life.

That was the near-delusional conclusion he drew after being forced to think about death for most of his eighteen years.

What was the meaning of life?

He wanted a purpose for his new existence—a reason behind getting a second chance.

“King Takuto...won’t you start over with me?”

“...Start over?”

Atou’s words slipped so perfectly into the empty void left behind after the fear of death was gone.

“Come. Please stand with me.”

With her gentle urging, Takuto stood. Apparently, he’d been

lying on what looked like a bed carved out of that stone dais. He stretched, as his muscles were a little stiff.

Atou watched him affectionately and waited until she saw an opening to keep talking, so as not to interrupt this moment for him.

“We don’t know where we are. This might be the world of *Eternal Nations*. Or it might be *your* world, King Takuto. Or maybe, it’s yet another world. But why don’t we do what we always have—and start over together? Let’s build our own empire.”

Her wish was terribly simple and completely in line with who they were. Though their relationship had been that of game character and player, they’d built up and expanded countless empires together. That’d been their way of life and what defined their relationship, which was why her request wasn’t a strange one. And it was only natural that it struck a chord with Takuto.

Atou swept into a reverent bow and watched him with eyes reflecting the deepest darkness as she waited for his answer. There was no way Takuto wouldn’t be moved by the emotion in those eyes. She was his favorite character, an essential piece of his life, and who he aspired to be like above all else.

Haha... Build an empire...? Me? A puny human with no power, land, treasure, or anything to his name?

Takuto felt inspired by Atou, who fondly called him “King” when he had nothing. No, “inspired” didn’t quite capture the feeling. It took every ounce of self-control to keep his rising emotions in check and to stop his body from trembling with unfettered excitement.

I don’t know what’s happening to us. I don’t even know where we are. But since I’ve gotten a second chance, I want to do it again. I’ll recreate those blissful days in this world.

Now he had a healthy body that could freely move. Endless possibilities lay before him now, with the curse of illness lifted. And on top of everything else, he had the best character from the game he sank so many years into at his side.

So Takuto decided to take a step forward. He was stepping out of that world where he could do nothing but wait for an empty, lonely death into this new world where he could finally carve his future with his own two hands.

He’d finally found freedom.

“Atou...”

“Yes, my king?”

“Let’s build our own nation, an empire just for the two of us. Let’s form a contract here and now.”

As soon as she heard those words, a flowery smile befitting the age she looked erased her seductive expression as she nodded vigorously.



“In that case...” Atou cleared her throat in preparation to say the binding words Takuto heard every time he summoned a Hero unit in the game.

“My name is Sludge Atou. The bastard child of the world-ruining mud. From this day forward, my mind, body, and soul are yours. Come, let us sink as low as we can together, my king.”

Takuto nodded and shook her hand, accepting the contract.

This is how, only after his death, the human named Takuto Ira went on to harbor a dream he wanted to make come true, no matter what at the expense of all else.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

* New Game Start! *

Player: Takuto Ira

Civilization: Mynoghra

Alignment: Evil

Difficulty: ???

OK

AFTER they'd finished the official contract rites, things became a little awkward between them. Atou was one thing, but Takuto had never taken part in a formal event before. This was also his first time essentially confessing to a beautiful girl by asking her to create an empire for just the two of them. As a matter of fact, it was also Atou's first time being told such a thing.

Simply put, both were squirming from embarrassment.

"...Wow, this is kinda embarrassing, isn't it?"

"Yes, it was a bit embarrassing for me too. But my happiness outweighs all that."

They giggled together, like a newly-together couple. But then, after a few moments, they switched into serious mode. They were in an unknown land, outside the realm of imagination. In the world of strategy, action was required to win. Knowing that well, Takuto decided to take immediate action.

"Well then, my one and only subordinate. My confidant and right-hand man. You know what our evil empire of Mynoghra must do first to lead the world to ruin, right?"

"Of course, my king!"

Was he trying to shake off the shyness hanging in the air? Or was it for a completely different reason? Whatever it was that drove him, Takuto jumped atop the dais and spoke to his sole confidant with the exaggerated air of a roleplayer.

Of course, Mynoghra's strongest Hero, Atou, was on the exact same page. Even if they didn't say it in words, they both understood what policies and guidelines were best for co-managing an empire. They'd acted on them thousands of times before.

This tactic had been burned into their minds. Their playstyle, their way of fighting, their way of empire-building, could all be summed up with one word.

"We're becoming shut-ins!"

"Let's close ourselves off!"

That was the secret method Takuto had used to lead Mynoghra.

Despite Mynoghra being named the "Evilest Empire" in the official game lore, all the civilization's traits gave domestic growth advantages and combat disadvantages, making it a finicky empire super-specialized in domestic affairs.



Sludge Atou

Combat Unit

Strength: 3 Move: 1

《Ruin +2》

《Darkness +1》

《Chaos +1》

《Evil》《Hero》《Fanatic》

※ This unit has a chance of obtaining the abilities of a unit it has defeated.



Description

～ The Great God of Light made man from mud. After that, an unknown and terrifying being created Atou from sludge. ～

Atou is Mynoghra's Hero unit.

She is very weak early in the game, and in some cases, she is inferior to normal units, but she has strong elemental affinities to make up for it.

Additionally, she can obtain the abilities of the units she defeats, and she has the highest growth potential of all Hero units.

Chapter 2: Scout

WITH the founding of their new empire out of the way, Takuto and Atou immediately started what would've counted as a domestic affairs turn in-game. They sat on the stone dais and considered their first move.

"Mynoghra is a mild-mannered, peace-loving civilization that governs over evil and ruin. We need to start by basing our strategy around those facts."

"You are absolutely correct, my king! In other words, we must avoid being detected. That's the golden rule during early game, right?"

"Right! We don't know where we are, but gathering information without letting anyone find us is our first move."

"I completely agree! Your tactics never cease to amaze me, my king!"

Takuto returned Atou's sparkling, expectant gaze with a wry smile, then took stock of their current position. About 150 feet around the stone dais was a clearing where only flowers grew. Beyond that lay a dense overgrowth of trees.

The local tree species had complex roots that bulged out of the ground, making it difficult to navigate. The trees were also monstrously tall, and Takuto had no knack for tree climbing. It was foolish to expect that from a former patient of the Intensive Care Unit for Rare Diseases.

I doubt Atou can climb either, and I don't feel comfortable sending her to scout the area...

Eternal Nations players started the game with a base and scout units, but Takuto didn't see anything like that around. Atou was classified as a combat unit, so she wasn't equipped for exploration. As it was, her current stats were abysmal, and Takuto wanted to take every precaution possible.

In other words, there were only a limited number of moves he could make right now. Even in this situation, there was still a path. It was only a matter of time before the thousands of in-game actions

he'd repeated gave him a hint.

"I guess our best move here is to use Emergency Production."

Atou immediately reacted to his words. "Emergency Production? I certainly remember a skill like that."

Takuto shifted his gaze toward her voice and nodded when she peered searchingly into his eyes.

As a strategy game, *Eternal Nations* has several types of main resources and sub-resources. Mana is one of them, and it is the most carefully managed strategic resource alongside Food and Materials. Basic gameplay consists of making your empire prosper by producing and managing various facilities and units with these three main resources.

Among those, Mana has similar properties to Currency and Energy in other games. Emergency Production is a skill that uses Mana to instantly produce any units or buildings. Of course, this useful skill came with disadvantages too.

"Ugh, Emergency Production is such an inefficient use of Mana. Heck, it's a complete rip-off. I seriously don't want to use it when we don't have a way to produce more Mana yet..."

Takuto heaved a heavy sigh while scratching his head. The fact was, he didn't have a better alternative. Atou was also groaning with her arms crossed, but neither could come up with an ingenious plan to overcome their present predicament. As it was, their current situation was different from the game, leaving them at an impasse.

"If we must, we must. How much Mana do you have total, my king?"

"About 200 if we go by game logic. We'll blow right through it."

In-game, resources are displayed with numbers. This was a video game concept, but Takuto could mentally convert what he had into those numbers. It made him dizzy to think he only had 200 Mana when he was used to having tens of thousands by endgame.

"Only 200? Then we want to make every drop count. With that in mind, what should we produce?"

"I considered a Base or a Mana Plant, but I want to start with a Scout."

Takuto and Atou both knew complaining about their situation wouldn't get them anywhere. Perhaps having someone else there to make decisions with was part of why they could both calmly think things through.

Despite experiencing the absurd situation of suddenly waking up in an unknown world, Takuto could adeptly form a strategy.

He chose information gathering as his first move. He couldn't take any risks when he didn't know what kind of world he was in. So he decided to learn more about it.

Takuto shifted his gaze back to Atou and asked, "Are you good with that?"

"Yes," she responded.

There was no way she would ever question his decision when she trusted Takuto unwaveringly. Still, he wanted to check with her. Her opinions mattered to him.

"Here we go! Emergency Production: Scout!"

Takuto took the plunge. With his shout, a torrent of invisible energy gathered in front of him and something appeared from the distorted space. The *thing* appeared, covered in goo like a baby from its mother's womb. It looked up at Takuto when it fell on its wobbling legs and let out a cry.

"GYEEEEEEEEEE!"

The torso resembled a praying mantis without the raptorial forelegs. Its legs were also much thicker and grotesquely longer than a mantis's. The cockeyed creature wouldn't stop emitting a nervous, high-pitched cry as its eyes rolled around, taking in its surroundings.

This was the Scout unit Takuto summoned—Long-legged Bug.

"Disgusting, huh?"

"It really *is*..."

Takuto's immediate reaction to his first subordinate was disgust. Seeing as Atou shared the sentiment, clearly, this bug didn't have a very agreeable appearance, even for the Civilization of Ruin.



Growing sick of gawking at the trembling Long-legged Bug with its restlessly rolling eyeballs, Takuto turned back to the girl, who was much easier on the eyes.

“Aren’t you used to these from seeing them in-game, Atou?”

“I *also* saw them only as you do in the game—as 3D images... The real thing is a bit much.”

“I see. Want to touch it to celebrate the moment?”

“No way! Why don’t *you* touch it, King Takuto?”

“I don’t want to touch it either!”

“Then why would you suggest I do it?!”

“Just thought it would be funny.”

“My King is such a bully!”

“Sorry!”

They playfully joked around. Meanwhile, the Long-legged Bug silently stood in place with its big, round eyes darting around. Of course, he—the Long-legged Bug—was only waiting for orders. But something about his grotesque appearance and huge eyes made him look like he was judging them. Realizing that with a start, Takuto and Atou cleared their throats at the same time.

“Well then, my little bug friend! I command you, in the name of the glorious Mynoghra, to go check out the area around us! Avoid contact with all other life forms. Surveying is your main task.”

“Complete your mission in a manner that does not disappoint our great king, Takuto Ira.”

“GYEGHYEEEEEEEEEE!”

Long-legged Bug let out another piercing, inhuman cry before zooming off into the dark forest in the creepy-crawly way only bugs possessed. As they watched him go, Takuto and Atou both sighed with a mix of emotions.

“I was a little worried at first, but it looks like it’s following orders like a proper unit. How’s it working for you, King Takuto?”

“I can share its vision to a certain extent. The information it gathers is beamed back into my head, too... Haha, it really is like the game, but with my brain acting as the computer screen.”

The world was displayed like a 3D map with Takuto at the center in his mind. Areas explored by the Long-legged Bug became visible to him, too, just like when the grayed-out regions of a game map, covered by the fog of war, are lit up after a unit passes

through.

A dry laugh escaped him over this all-too-convenient skill.

"I guess we can say things are going smoothly for now. Speaking of which, how much Mana do you have left, my king?"

"I just used up 100 and have 100 left. I need 20 just to build the first base: "Settlement." We need to be strategic with what's left."

"Just because we have some Mana doesn't mean we can afford to waste it, right?"

Forcibly producing units that required specific facilities, time, and resources, consumed enormous amounts of Mana. Units with facility and resource perquisites like the Scout cost much more than a Settlement, which counted as an essential facility at the start of the game. Obviously, they didn't have the Mana to spare to produce additional units.

"I actually wanted to get us a Warrior in case of attack, but it's out of the picture with our current Mana. It's really hard to take action like this."

"I will handle our enemies'...is what I would love to say, but I'll struggle to win a fight even against wild animals right now. Running into enemy forces would pretty much mean game over."

Atou currently had 3 Strength. That was low compared to even the non-combat unit Long-legged Bug's 1. Her weakness was further proven by the early-game combat unit Warrior starting with 3 Strength, and the wild animal unit Wolf having a base Strength of 1.5.

In other words, with Sludge Atou as its Hero unit, Mynoghra started the game off in the precarious predicament of being unilaterally destroyed by any enemy they encountered.

"This is quite the nasty difficulty level..."

"I-It always *has* been. Please keep your chin up, my king!"

Sure, they'd experienced similar situations hundreds of times before—in the *game*. Takuto couldn't help wishing reality had slightly easier settings. His solace in all this was Atou and her words of encouragement.



SEVERAL hours later...

Takuto's Scout seemed to be doing a good job exploring the area as the layout of their surroundings gradually dispersed the fog of war. To a strategy game player, information is an indispensable resource. Coupled with their current situation, intel was worth more than gold.

Relieved of the uneasiness and sense of impending crisis he didn't even know he was feeling, Takuto took a breath and decided to share what he'd learned with Atou.

"How is it going?"

"Not bad. I've got a general grasp of the nearby terrain, but it's just trees, trees, and more trees. Maybe we're in the middle of a huge forest. Oh, and our bug friend hasn't encountered any wild animals or monsters."

Aside from ensuring their immediate safety, Long-legged Bug wasn't sending back very interesting information. The forest just continued on endlessly without offering anything of value.

Perhaps there were still things they hadn't discovered yet, but it was hard to tell with their current Surveying skill. It didn't help that Long-legged Bug liked to explore in random circles, causing the map to take on a warped shape in Takuto's mind.

"So the whole area is forest? Forest Terrains are ideal for hiding with their Concealment effect that works on normal units, but...it's odd for there not only to be a lack of monsters, but no wildlife either."

"There also aren't any Food Icons. Looks like we'll have to continue scouting for a while."

"I'm sorry I can't be of more help..."

Atou bowed deeply with a sad frown creasing her brow. She seemed seriously bothered by the fact she couldn't do anything for Takuto. Obviously, her looking more depressed than a puppy who just got scolded didn't slip his notice.

"Don't be sorry. Just you being here with me is a huge help, Atou."

The words he selected to cheer her up seemed to hit the spot. Takuto didn't mean anything profound by his casual remark. But as soon as she heard it, Atou looked back at him with shimmering eyes and flushed cheeks.

Takuto finally understood the extent to which she respected, admired, and adored him as her king. Atou was the type of person who took everything he said more seriously than he intended.

“M-My king... I am moved beyond words!”

“R-Really? I’m glad you’re happy.”

Takuto came face to face with how much she respected him when she leaned forward to express her joy. As someone who’d never experienced unbridled affection from a girl before, he felt flustered by it but also happy to have someone he could interact with like this. Even if that someone was a video game’s hero of destruction who commanded the forces of ruin...

Atou’s supposed to be the Hero unit of an evil civilization, but she has a surprisingly cute and playful side...

Aside from her pointy ears and blood-red eyes, Atou seemed like any other sweet and innocent girl her age as she gazed with starry-eyed fondness at Takuto. He was more than a little surprised to learn the hero of an evil civilization had such an adorable personality.

Now that I think about it, what was Atou’s personality supposed to be in the flavor text?

Takuto pondered that question for a long moment. Oddly enough, he couldn’t remember a single detail that would’ve been written about her character to add depth to the game world.

“King...! King Takuto! Are you listening to me?”

“Whoa! Wh-What was that? Sorry, I zoned out for a second.”

His doubts instantly vanished when Atou leaned in extra close to get his attention. She was too content with his attention returning to her to notice he was feigning calm to prevent her from catching on to his racing heart.

“Are you all right? Do you feel sick somewhere?”

“I’m fine. Just got lost in thought, is all. Don’t worry—Hm? Our bug scout is contacting me.”

“I’m glad you aren’t ill. Did the Scout find something?”

Takuto nodded and concentrated on the image in his head.

He had practiced sharing Long-legged Bug’s vision plenty of times before this, so he accessed it with ease now. The image of stealthily looking down from up so high in the trees that the fall would kill a weaker unit flowed into his mind. Takuto couldn’t clearly distinguish the details because the Scout’s eyes constantly darted around, but he saw what looked like a settlement and people.

Pale skin, silver hair, long, pointed ears—if memory served him well, those traits belonged to the race called Dark Elves.

“Is that a Dark Elf settlement? They seem to be grouped together in a location not far from here.”

Takuto explained exactly what he saw to Atou with his eyes closed and his attention concentrated on the images that continued to flow into his mind.

Atou didn't bother her master with redundant questions. She drew her conclusions based solely on the information he provided her.

“I suppose we can safely assume we're in a fantasy world now. Dark Elves are neutral but swing closer to neutral evil, so that's a bit of a relief.”

Once he finished confirming the map marker, Takuto stopped sharing the Scout's vision and rubbed the corners of his eyes. While they didn't gain much insight beyond the fact there was a Dark Elf settlement nearby, that was exactly the kind of information they were after. This discovery drastically limited their options in this new world and did nothing to reduce the mountain of problems they had to tackle.

“Does this mean we really *are* in the world of *Eternal Nations*? Either way, I want to tread carefully in case of the unexpected. They could be neutral good Dark Elves, too—and they're hecka close. We're screwed if that's another empire's starter base.”

“Bordering another empire this early in the game is the worst thing possible...”

“It's a shitty starter location, that's for sure...”

“If it comes down to it, let's run far away, my king.”

“I'm with you there. To run is to win. Mynoghra loves peace and quiet after all.”

“Right? War is such a barbaric thing!”

They shared a laugh and began formulating their plan.

Worst-case scenario, our lives are in danger. But what will be will be.

Takuto thought it a little strange how calm and optimistic he was in such a dangerous situation, but all his doubts were washed away by the aura of respect coming from Atou. Ultimately, he was okay with whatever happened, as long as he had her by his side.

“Okay, I've got a plan! Why don't we observe those Dark Elves and get more info on them first? If they look like they're too much to handle, we can just run for it.”

“We can just flee into the night together! I'm all for that plan,

my king!”

They raised their fists into the air and enthusiastically settled on that plan. They were acting a bit like children playing House, but there was no one around to put a stop to their antics—

—*until there was.*

Just as Atou finished layering Takuto with praise, they heard the trees rustle, and a couple of twigs snap underfoot. Atou immediately switched gears from playing along with their lighthearted banter, sharply turning toward the source like a poisonous viper ready to attack. Takuto looked in the same direction a few seconds after she did.

“Crap...”

A group of several people stepped out of the trees. Their race looked familiar, despite Takuto seeing them in-person for the first time.

They were the Dark Elves he and Atou had just been discussing.



Long-legged Bug

Scout Unit

Strength: 1 Move: 2

《Scout》

《Evil》



Description

～ Their long legs quickly traverse bad terrain and their eyes see far and wide. There's not another creature out there more suited to being a Scout than the Long-legged Bugs—as long as you can stomach their grotesque appearance and disturbing cries. ～

The Long-legged Bug is a Scout unit unique to Mynoghra.

Scouts are recon units that can be produced at the start of the game. What they lack in strength, they make up for in high movement and sight stats.

They can also reduce the movement penalty caused by some terrains.

Chapter 3: Dark Elves

DARK Elf Warrior Captain Gia Nageev Mazaram trudged heavily down the unbeaten path. His body, once touted as being Steel by the neighboring countries, had wasted away, to the point he might even lose a fight to a child. The several warriors accompanying him were in similar decline.

The forest was endless and gloomy, dominated only by a dark atmosphere and a lifeless chill.

“There really isn’t anything here, is there?”

“Captain Gia, um, don’t you think we should leave the Accursed Lands now...?”

Gia shook his head, yet again rejecting the same suggestion that he’d heard one too many times by now. He wanted to tell them not to keep making him repeat himself, but he intimately understood his subordinates’ feelings as he felt the same. But their current circumstances would never allow for it.

“What do we achieve by leaving the forest now? We have nowhere to go after being driven from our land. And I highly doubt the children will survive this aimless travel much longer... Vegetation is abundant here—there *must* be food somewhere. Push through for our brethren.”

The smile he plastered on his face was far from convincing. But his subordinates had no choice but to obey. They would have no reason to keep pushing forward if they gave up hope now. But, contrary to their greatest wish, what they sought—food—was nowhere to be found.

“But this damn ominous forest definitely gives you the chills, doesn’t it?”

Searching in silence was terrible for morale. Gia decided to start up a conversation in light of everyone running low on stamina. He felt as if he might go mad if he didn’t say something—the fathomless depths of the still forest didn’t help.

“The Cursed Sea of Trees lying at the edge of Idoragya’s Uncharted Territory—also known as the Accursed Lands. Ancient

records speak of a great evil sealed here. Whatever it is, they say it won't allow life to prosper within its realm..."

"Hahaha. That's just superstition. If it were true, there wouldn't be so many trees everywhere. Doesn't the vegetation that won't let us see more than a few feet ahead count as life?"

It was Gia's adjutant, a woman well-versed in legends and folklore, who broached the unsettling topic. She was an avid reader who used to spend most of her wages on books, lending her knowledge and words a certain degree of credibility. But Gia deliberately laughed her off. Everyone prayed her fears wouldn't become a reality. As Warrior Captain, he couldn't show weakness.

"Don't give up. Never give up. The noble spirits of our ancestors will surely show us the way to overcome this trial."

The reason why Gia was revered as a warrior captain was not only due to his skill but also his mental fortitude. He accomplished his missions without ever being crushed by impossible circumstances. This fortitude was why he remained Warrior Captain and continued to take the vanguard, even as his race teetered on extinction.

Motivated by Gia's encouraging speech, his subordinates marched into the unknown darkness, believing a path would open for them and that they'd be saved from this desperate situation, as he said.

At long last, the world opened up before them.

Perhaps they expected a miracle to happen. The clearly man-made space was enough to incite hope just for being different from everything else they'd seen thus far. Maybe a recluse lived there in secret. Or maybe it was a location where edible plants grew en masse. It might even be a nest for wild animals. Or, just maybe, it was where God would mercifully grant them comfort from their suffering.

However, all their hopes were shattered. For only ruin existed there.

We're doomed...!

Regret washed over Gia the second he saw *it*. A stone dais loomed in the center of the clearing that seemed to be carved out of the dense forest. At first glance, the scenery might be viewed as sacred and meaningful, but what existed there was a problem.

First, there was the girl standing directly beside the dais, assessing them with an unrelenting gaze. Mousy, ash-colored hair

stood out alongside her dress decorated by gold embellishments twisted in distorted directions.

The eyes sizing Gia up were the living embodiment of abnormal, and they told everyone present that she wasn't of this world, that she was connected to the root of darkness, and the danger she engendered was fatal.

But the girl was the lesser of the two evils. The problem was the other person present. Nay, Gia wasn't certain the other could even be called a person.

The second being was a paradoxical phenomenon that seemed to have stepped right out of the legend Gia's adjutant spoke of.

Its shape was human—but the rest was indistinguishable. Blacked out of view, as if rejected by the world itself, it was undoubtedly the manifestation of the great evil spoken of in the legends. The being was so dreadful, so abominable, it made him wonder: did something go wrong to break the natural law of the world, which would make it crumble and fall to ruin?

I don't know what it is. But my instincts can't stop screaming that it's nothing good.

The girl's gaze never moved off of Gia and his subordinates, and it was likely that the evil being was also watching them. Gia's subordinates didn't so much as breathe. Understanding his next move would determine the fate of his race, Gia chose his words carefully.

"I-I am the Warrior Captain Gia Nageev of the Dark Elf Mazaram Clan. I can see you are a powerful and noble being! Please allow me to first apologize for entering this forest without permission!"

Gia slowly kneeled, head bowed, careful not to provoke the evil being.



It was a sign of respect, although he didn't know if his intentions were understood by these inhuman beings. Fortunately, Gia's subordinates followed his lead.

Gia waited to be spoken to. His instincts compelled him to show the utmost respect and gratitude.

"...Hmm. You seem to fully understand what it means to enter this land, don't you, dark fae? Well then, what reason brought you to break the taboo?"

The girl spoke after a multi-second pause. Gia and his people were on pins and needles awaiting their fate, but her response brought some relief. At least they could communicate.

Of course, they didn't think for a moment that they were out of hot water. They were merely granted temporary pardon on a passing whim. That was the only thing Gia knew for certain.

"Our Dark Elf clan, Mazaram, once resided in a land at the center of the Idoragya Continent. However, our former masters, the supreme elven decision-making body known as the Tetrarchy Council—"

"Be quick about it."

"W-We were persecuted and chased out of our land. With nowhere else to go, we came to this forest..."

Gia hastily summarized after provoking the girl's irritation. Trying to carefully and elaborately explain their dire circumstances was a mistake.

Our lives are in their hands, he reminded himself. *What should I do? Should I say something? Or do I wait for them to speak first?*

His thoughts spun in dizzying circles, and his heart thudded so hard it hurt. Between his shallow breaths, the cold sweat coating his body, the deep forest darkness, and the being embodying an evil so great, it could consume the blackness of night—Gia was at his limit. Just as he was about to beg for mercy—

"You're just skin and bones, aren't you?"

The *thing* sitting on top of the dais spoke.

Gia shuddered as if something had just crawled down his spine. He was trembling so hard he could see himself shaking. Sweat poured from his pores, accompanied by utter disgust.

Its voice sounded like a young man. Yet there wasn't a modicum of emotion in it—he couldn't even sense a will or soul from it. Even the dead writhing in hell would have a little more life

and feeling to their voice. The *thing's* voice was uncanny and ghastly enough to make Gia think those things, slowing down his brain from reacting in a timely manner.

"My king asked you a question."

The girl's voice was filled with palpable anger.

"Our persecution was so severe that we came to this land to escape! We ran out of food along the way and couldn't secure more while trying to lose our pursuers... We haven't eaten for days."

Shocked to discover he'd unknowingly committed the grave transgression of ignoring the *thing's* question, Gia hastily explained himself in a pathetic voice. The words that came out hoarse toward the end represented his immeasurable regret.

"Hmm."

The evil being seemed satisfied with Gia's explanation. With it satisfied, the girl also seemed appeased enough to give a slight nod. He'd just successfully crossed a very thin piece of ice again. Of course, there was no visible end to the danger.

Why? Why must we be punished like this?! What did we do wrong to deserve this?! All we wanted was a safe place to live!

They were forced to bow their heads and beg for mercy simply for entering the forest. They did nothing else wrong!

What's going to happen to me? I don't care about myself. But what about my subordinates and clansmen? What tragic end is in store for them after this evil being has its way with them?

Shivering from imagining a chilling future, Gia was consumed by a vortex of irrepressible rage and sorrow.

Is wanting to survive really that sinful?!

Something plopped onto the ground and rolled in front of him.

Gia swayed like a tree in the middle of a storm, his mind filled with the ridiculous thought that he'd just heard the sound of his own head falling off. Could anyone really blame him for squeezing his eyes shut in utter terror? Long gone was the Mazaram clan's warrior captain once feared for his dauntless courage—in his place was a mere mortal, miserably shaking in his boots.

But then he opened his eyes, lured more by the sweet, herbaceous smell tickling his nose than the whereabouts of his own head. A single, juicy red fruit had rolled onto the ground in front of him.

"Wh-What is this?"

"For you," the *thing* replied simply.

Gia gulped without even realizing his mouth was watering. The fruit bore a shape he'd never seen before.

As far as they knew, fruits were small and hard. Although most fruit could be somewhat sweet, they were more bitter and sour, and while they tended to be edible raw, they were a food that could only be eaten after taking several steps to make it palpable.

But the round thing before him was different. The juicy aroma conveyed its sweetness, and its shiny, deep red skin appealed to his eyes, like it was begging him to just eat it already.

When Gia picked it up, the fruit weighed heavily in his hand, telling him it was packed full of nutrients. This gemlike fruit was probably the type only nobility could eat—nay, not even they had likely tried it.

There, in his hand, was the food he—and all his people—desired.

“It’s an apple—ever heard of it? Tastes good if you turn it into a rabbit.”

Gia understood less than half of the words the being uttered. At the very least, he managed to learn the round fruit was called an *apuhl* and that it was edible.

“An...*apuhl*? I’m afraid it looks different from every fruit I know of...”

The being had said, “For you.”

In that case, he should cause no offense by accepting it. But Gia’s confounded thoughts made him wonder whether it was really okay. He worried whether it was rude to eat in this sacred clearing. Plus, he had reservations about consuming food while his clansmen starved at their encampment.

“It’s *good!!*”

“So sweet! And juicy too!”

From those remarks, Gia realized his subordinates had tried the fruit before he made his decision. But whatever decision he would’ve come to, he likely couldn’t have stopped his starving warriors.

He spun around to see what his men were doing, only to find them ravenously sinking their teeth into the fruit the being must have given them. Juices and an incredibly sweet aroma overflowed from the fruit they clutched in their hands.

Gia gulped loudly and wavered on whether he should partake with them, but he had something more pressing to do first. He

glanced back at the shadow being. Fortunately, *it* seemed to be nodding contentedly. By that reaction, it appeared his subordinates did the right thing rather than being disrespectful.

Relief washed over him while, at the same time, he felt the need to scold his men for greedily devouring the fruit. But, in the end, he couldn't tell them off when he saw the large teardrops falling from their eyes as they stuffed their mouths. He understood their suffering and starvation firsthand.

“Have some pears too.”

Something else plopped onto the ground and rolled in front of Gia. It was a green fruit this time. *Pehr*...that was another food they were unfamiliar with. The green skin made it seem unripe, but the overflowing sweet scent that was different from that of the *apuhls* dispelled that concern. This was yet another exquisite source of food. Gia picked it up and stared at it dumbly.

“You there! What is *wrong* with you? It's a precious gift from my king. Accept it.”

The girl wore her displeasure and suspicion on her sleeve. Gia didn't know *what* the evil being was thinking. But he could get a read on the girl's personality to some extent.

She wholeheartedly respected and served the embodiment of ruin sitting there. She would likely never stand for anything that upset her master. An insolent person who treated her master's gifts with disdain was no exception. In light of that fact, Gia appealed to the girl and the *being* she served.

“There are others who escaped with us to this land. Young children among them...and those children—*our* children—are starving to death. They haven't eaten anything for days and are wasting away. Please give this generous and benevolent gift of food to those children rather than me. I beg you...”

Gia tasted something metallic on his tongue. Blood was seeping into his mouth from the corner of his lip. Without even realizing it, he'd bitten his lip in a bid to keep his overwhelming feelings of cowardliness and shame at bay.

He no longer heard munching and slurping from his subordinates either. His words had likely reminded them of their mission. Their clansmen were waiting for them as they fought against their hunger. With so many of their people no longer capable of even standing, they'd only one job to do.

But that was their problem.

Gia heard the girl click her tongue as if to silently convey it wasn't her master's concern. Even so, he bowed his head as if his life depended on it—and it did. That was the last shred of pride he'd left to give. He was going to bring this food back with him no matter the cost.

Gia did not back down, even when faced with a terrifying being of legend and the embodiment of ruin. Eyes filled with unwavering determination eloquently conveyed his resolve to achieve his goal at the cost of his own life.

His heartfelt plea was answered all too swiftly.

“I feel for you.”

The being undeniably said those four words.

“W-Wait! King Takuto?!”

The girl raced to her master's side in a flurry and quietly advised *it*, but the jet-black darkness did not heed her.

Something plopped onto the ground, followed by the sound of many things spilling onto the ground together.

Gia's jaw dropped as he watched the surreal miracle unfold before him. Out of thin air appeared more fruit, giant lumpy potatoes, and grain that resembled wheat.

That wasn't all either: there was bread so soft, it squished when the fruit touched it; dressed animal carcasses with so much meat and fat on the bone it made you wonder how much they had to fatten the livestock for it; and on top of all that, there were beans, vegetables, salt, and what looked like spices. A literal mountain of food appeared from nothing, with that *being* as the source.

“For you.”

Gia couldn't hide the waterfall of tears streaming down his astounded face, understanding the meaning of those words. This was the pure definition of benevolence. This omnipotent *being* listened to their circumstances and said, “I feel for you.” Then it produced an abundance of food solely to help them and their clansmen.

Accepting charity was foreign to their people. Dark Elves were an abhorrent race that'd fled the light. They were only allowed to barely survive by the mercy of the Elves, the Fae of Light. They lived in the shadows as objects of contempt.

No one was sympathetic when Gia and his people were

banished. On the contrary, many said the world was purer now that the Dark Fae were gone. Elves naturally avoided them, but so did mankind, Dwarves, and every other race.

Gia believed that was their lot in life and their fate. He was convinced living nobly in harsh conditions, and enduring isolation from the rest of the world, was his race's calling. He'd absorbed the idea that their lot in life was to tremble in a freezing, isolated corner of the world, with no god to save them.

But he was wrong.

This *being* extended them a helping hand.

Maybe they were being deceived.

Just maybe, it was toying with their emotions out of pure malice.

But even if that *were* the case, no one had ever sympathized with them, much less offered them aid.

"It's a miracle!"

"We're saved!"

"Oooh, thank you! Thank you, almighty being!"

Gia could tell his subordinates were beside themselves with joy.

"Almighty one, what...d-do they call you...?" Gia had to ask.

He only just realized he'd yet to ask that *being's* name. He figured the word the girl used to address her master with was likely the name of the one clad in darkness. But that wasn't good enough—Gia wanted to hear his name directly from him.

He wanted to know the glorious name of the being that had brought about this miracle as easily as waving a hand—the name of the benevolent one who'd bestowed the warmth of compassion on his race for the first time.

"Take it."

It only answered with those two words in a detached voice devoid of emotion.



Emergency Production

Policy Command

Emergency Production is a special command that uses **Mana** as a resource to produce all sorts of goods.

It can produce every building or unit available to a civilization, but it consumes a greater amount of **Mana** in direct correlation to the Building **Materials** and Food required for producing the item.

Emergency Production can also produce **Materials** and Food, but not strategic resources. The **Mana** cost of these goods can be reduced with technological advancements and the prerequisite buildings.

Chapter 4: Encampment

DEATH quietly visited the temporary Dark Elf encampment at the edge of the Accursed Lands. Around five hundred Dark Elves camped there, mostly women and children, with very few able-bodied men. The only thing these people huddled together had in common were the lack of meat on their bones and the color of despair clouding their eyes.

A baby could occasionally be heard crying, but even those eventually grew hoarse and faded away. They didn't have the energy to keep crying—and babies were given priority with food and supplies. Everyone of all ages was at their limits.

But fate seems to favor dramatic developments—their situation had finally changed for the better.

A woman with relatively more energy than the rest noticed something strange in the air as she took care of the sick. She smelled something funny. No—she smelled food! Whatever it was, it had a strong, sweet aroma. Some of the others noticed it as well.

The smell was followed by the sound of people pushing their way through the trees. The camp suddenly grew noisy. Did the Warrior Captain entrusted with their fate bring back what they were all dying in wait of?

Did what they had half given up on become an actuality?

“We're back! Gather around! We found food!”

A miracle occurred. Life returned to their blank faces. Everyone ran to the glorious Warrior Captain, stumbling and staggering as they went, and practically snatched up the food he handed out.

“Prepare the pots! We're cooking a feast! Where are the sickest and neediest people? Feed them these fruits!”

The camp instantly came to life. Everyone mustered what little energy they had left to get to work. Some prepared the pots, some fetched water, some started a fire, while others rushed to the sick with fruit.

The hemp bag the Warrior team had brought back was packed

with food. Most stared in shock at the provisions that burst from it, but they all went about their respective jobs, knowing they had no time to spare.

Ultimately, the clan that'd been on the verge of extinction had escaped immediate danger. Some lives were teetering on the edge, but the Warrior Captain's team had come back with food just in time to save them. The first good news in ages brought joy to everyone's faces.

The overflowing provisions were more than enough to fill everyone's empty stomachs.

Where'd they get so much food from?

No matter how hungry they were, shouldn't they have rationed it better?

The middle-aged woman who wondered these things asked the Warrior Captain, but he evaded her question, and her doubts were eventually drowned out by the desire to satiate her hunger and by experiencing the finest food she had ever tasted.



THE din quieted down after a few hours. Excess food had been carefully set aside and was under strict surveillance.

The majority of people fell fast asleep now that their bellies were full, leaving only the sound of firewood crackling under the empty pots to break the silent night.

By obtaining temporary provisions, the starving Mazaram Clan safely survived the night they'd feared many wouldn't make it through. At long last, they could finally rest, instead of spending another sleepless night tormented by hunger pangs.

But it is during the nights, while the majority rests, that the minority must stay awake.

Warrior Captain Gia sat beside a small campfire a slight distance from the encampment, silently gazing at the starry sky through the gaps in the canopy.

"You did...well today, boy."

"Elder Moltar? How fare our people?"

From the trees untouched by the firelight appeared Sage Moltar, the elder who guided the Mazaram Clan and the man considered the oldest Dark Elf alive. With a body like a withered

branch, he slowly ambled out of the dark with his staff and sat directly across from Gia, the campfire between them.

After a slight pause, he answered Gia's question in a strong and dignified voice that belied his frail body.

"They are all sound asleep with full bellies. Even the twins have recovered from that horrible state. The fruit you brought back is miraculous. I'm confident I've lived longer than most, but not even I have seen such fruit before."

Moltar quietly closed his eyes and thought back on the day's events. It felt as chaotic as being out at sea during a storm, only for the clouds to break. A single ray of light broke through their despair.

Gia, who'd returned with words of hope, brought more than enough food to fill everyone's stomach and then some. He'd brought home a startling amount of delicious foods Moltar had never heard of or seen before.

"Aye. I also tried a bite of that fruit—it was divine. I never knew such delicious fruit existed in this world."

After confirming every one of his clansmen had eaten, Gia finally bit into an *apuhl*. He would never forget that moment for the rest of his life.

Startling sweetness spilled into his mouth with the pleasant crunch of his teeth sinking into the skin. Juices gushed from its flesh with every single bite. He could feel his dehydrated body quickly regain its strength.

Saying it was a heavenly experience didn't do it justice. Even if he didn't understand it in his head, he had experienced true joy for having satisfied the basic desire of all living things to eat. Indeed, it was an unthinkable experience outside the realms of common sense.

"...What transpired in those woods?"

Gia kept silent. He couldn't withhold the truth, but he struggled to come up with a good way to explain. It'd been such a surreal experience, and more than anything else, he couldn't shake the innate fear that that *being* was tricking them.

Moltar saw he was conflicted and waited without rushing him. Judging by the pensive silence Gia kept with a tormented look on his face, Moltar determined he must've brought back even worse trouble than he'd expected, and he decided it was better not to press him with a barrage of questions.

He ran into trouble that can't be dealt with easily by ordinary

means. Is it something my knowledge and experience can get us through? Moltar quietly prepared himself for the worst. But the answer to his question exceeded his imagination.

“We met a legendary being in the middle of the forest.”

Moltar’s long, white eyebrows shot up.

A variety of legendary beings had been recorded over the ages. Some were good and some were evil. Some were friendly toward humanoid races, such as humans and elves, while others were hostile. The beings were as diverse and numerous as their legends, with their immense strength as the only common denominator among them.

This was the cursed forest mankind kept clear of—the Accursed Lands. Moltar prayed with all his might that his fears were unfounded.

“Which legendary being? Is it from a legend I know of?”

“I think my adjutant mentioned it was the being sealed in the Accursed Lands or something like that?”

“You encountered the King of Ruin?!”

Moltar felt dizzy. His worst fear had come true.

The Traveling Colossus, the Living Ocean, the Messenger from Another Dimension, the Automatic Torture Machine—of all the legendary beings, they had encountered the most dangerous and nightmarish one.

Moltar managed to keep calm despite the horrifying situation and his frustration over the endless suffering his race had to endure by rallying all the experience he’d cultivated over his decades of life.

“You’ve heard of it, Elder Moltar?”

“There are a handful of ancient records and folktales that claim the King of Ruin will appear when the world becomes overpopulated. It will destroy everything in existence, making everyone start over from the beginning. I don’t know if it’s the same being, but I also can’t definitively say it’s not... Did it introduce itself as such?”

There weren’t too many tales about the King of Ruin. The few myths and legends that did exist were disjointed, with some saying the King of Ruin was sealed in the Accursed Lands, others saying it would suddenly appear from nowhere, and one claiming god had already destroyed it.

The King of Ruin’s objective to destroy the world was the sole

consistency.

"I didn't hear its name. It didn't introduce itself. But the King of Ruin...certainly is a fitting name for the fear-inspiring being I met."

"Did you *speak* with the King?"

"No, the King was a being beyond our comprehension. But there was a girl there who clarified the King's words for us."

Gia thought back on his encounter. Who—or *what*—was that girl? The one thing he could say for certain was that she wasn't just some normal girl the King had found in these parts.

She was evil—pure evil. She alone posed a threat to this world. The darkness she exuded made that clear.

Hair the color of burnt ashes. Distorted clothes with a mind of their own. Skin whiter than the dead. And eyes brimming with fathomless darkness that seemed to despise the entire world.

Gia shuddered, remembering the way her eyes had coldly picked him apart.

"I don't know if what you met was the King of Ruin, but it's undoubtedly not a good being. I can tell now that I've recovered some Mana after eating. This forest is twisted. We should've noticed sooner."

If only they'd realized the dangers this forest posed sooner, they might've been able to avoid this predicament. Even if they couldn't avoid entering the Accursed Lands, they could've chosen a location where they wouldn't have stumbled upon the King of Ruin.

But "should've, would've, and could've" didn't reflect reality. It was because they hadn't noticed that they were faced with this very present danger.

A danger that threatened to bring doom.

"What did you give in return for the food?"

"Nothing. It just gave it to us without asking anything in return."

"Ha! You honestly believe an evil being would bestow gifts without expecting anything in return?"

"I don't know. We were just asked about our situation and answered. That's all that transpired."

"Then why did the King of Ruin aid you?"

Silence fell between them.

Gia didn't understand why either. If nothing else, he understood different rules were at work than those he had come to

know as the natural law of things.

Evil beings hate everything alive. Because of this hatred, they never act in the interest of the living. The only exception to the rule is when they form a contract where they take something in return—
—or when they are deceiving you...

But Gia had a completely different outlook. He believed in yet another possibility. That was why, even with the fear he might've been deceived, Gia put how he felt into words and explained his take away to the frail old sage.

"Out of benevolence."

"*Benevolence...*you say?"

Leeriness filled Elder Moltar's eyes. His reaction edged closer to hostility, and he stealthily curled his hand around his staff on the ground so Gia wouldn't notice.

"Yes, benevolence. His Benevolence sympathized with our situation and gave us a boon."

"Fool! You just referred to that thing as 'His Benevolence.' Were you ensorcelled?!"

"I swear I have not been!"

"Then why did you thoughtlessly call *it* His Benevolence?! Those are words reserved for those who deserve our respect!"

Moltar's anger exploded. He lifted his staff from the ground and thrust it at Gia. Although he was old, he was a sorcerer who'd survived decades of war. His spell would release faster than Warrior Captain Gia could jump out of the way.

But Gia didn't cower in the face of imminent death, choosing instead to counter the furious mage's attack with words.

"His Benevolence! Bestowed food! Upon our starving people! It's only natural to respect him!"

"But we're dealing with an evil being! Do you not feel the miasma of ruin filling this forest?!"

"What's miasma got to do with it?! His Benevolence said he felt for our starving people. That's the real truth here!"

"You were tricked! It was trying to beguile you with pretty words!"

"Then...! Then what *should* I have done?! We're only able to waste our energy pointlessly arguing because he fed us!"

With that remark, their explosive volley came to a close.

Elder Moltar fully understood what would've become of them had the King of Ruin not granted them these alms. But his concerns

and fear of their unknown future surrounded in darkness gave rise to his outburst.

And at the same time, he finally admitted that he had no choice but to move forward and negotiate with what appeared to be the King of Ruin. He had to.

“Tell me, Elder Moltar: what should I have done...?”

“Not even *I* know the answer to that query...”

A hoarse voice answered Gia’s quiet and tired question as both men lost the energy to fight.

Neither knew the right answer. They didn’t have much of a choice in the first place, which was exactly why they had to accept reality for what it was.

That was all there was to it.

“I’m sorry, brave clan warrior Gia. You did well.”

Gia accepted his apology with a slight nod. He’d been appointed as the next chief of the Mazaram Clan. He had a good understanding of the pressure Elder Moltar felt as the current leader.

“I will handle negotiations with the King as the Dark Elf Chief. I don’t know what this being is thinking, but I have lived for two hundred years—I will make it work.”

“Please do.”

With that, the discussion was over.

Only the sound of crackling firewood offered them some solace.

“I wonder when we will be able to sleep in peace...”

The King had casually produced a mountain of food. Gia’s men could only carry home less than ten percent of it, and the girl serving the King told them to come back for the rest as soon as possible.

“We should probably go see them as soon as tomorrow morning,” Gia told Elder Moltar, and they began discussing their plans.

The King of Ruin spoken of in legends—the shadowy being was evil enough to convince them that was who they were dealing with.

Moltar gazed at the star-studded night sky to restrain the feelings of terror he had long since forgotten.



MEANWHILE, around the same time, the very King of Ruin the Dark Elves shuddered in fear of was—

“King Takuto, on your knees! Why did you use our precious Mana on something like that?!”

“B-Because I felt bad for them...”

“That’s *not* a good enough reason!”

“Eeep!”

—in the middle of being browbeaten by his confidant for being uneconomical.



Dark Elf

Race

《Race Traits》

Forest Bonus	+ 15%
Night Vision Bonus	+ 5%
Cold Resistance Bonus	+ 10%
Fecundity Bonus	— 5%
Food Production Bonus	— 5%



Description

～ Strong light creates darkness of the same intensity.
The Light Fae are no exception to this. ～

Dark Elves are a neutral race whose ancestors are Ancient Elves.

They specialize in magic and assassination, which are mainly classified as dark attributes. They have Forest Bonuses, Cold Resistance Bonuses, and Night Vision Bonuses as racial traits.

In return, they have lost the Magic and Archery aptitudes of Elves and inevitably require a different playstyle.

Chapter 5: Negotiations

IN most situations, a man has no leg to stand on before a woman's wrath.

The same held true of the King of Ruin and his loyal subordinate, proving even they weren't an exception to the rules that govern the relationship between men and women.

Takuto, the man who'd become the commander of Mynoghra in this new world, was presently imploring his direct subordinate to cheer up after his careless decision ruined her mood.

"C-C'mon...cheer up, Atou."

"*Hmph!* I'm not in a bad mood or anything."

The aura she was exuding begged to differ.

She had every right to be annoyed when Takuto had so arbitrarily decided to waste their precious, limited Mana supply on some measly Dark Elves. He hadn't expected it to upset her *this* much, so he'd spent every moment since apologizing in hopes her mood would improve.

It would have if he'd realized the girl was more irritated that he'd failed to consult her than at the wastefulness of his actions. But that was asking too much of a boy who'd spent the bulk of his life in the hospital with little to no interaction with the opposite sex.

On the bright side, his desperate attempt to appease her with endless apologies seemed to gradually wear Atou down until she felt bad about not forgiving him.

"Okay! How about this? I'll do anything you say if you forgive me!"

"I-Isn't doing *anything* going a little too far? I'm not *that* angry..." Atou chewed out, staring up at Takuto from under her long lashes.

She was starting to worry her master might abandon her if she continued to act coy. She planned to forgive him as soon as he gave her good reason to.

"I can't do this without you, Atou. I *need* you."

"K-King Takuto..."

Frankly speaking, Atou was easy to win over.

For the most part, this girl put her master first, so one or two nice words from him and she was ready to let bygones be bygones. This was unavoidable when Takuto was her whole world, and especially when her whole life—though restricted to the confines of a video game—had been spent by his side.

“I’m sorry for being so stubborn too! I’m a disgrace of a subordinate for objecting to my mighty King’s decision.”

“I’m the one who’s sorry! We came to this world together, so I should’ve consulted you first. Will you forgive me?”

She nodded, and with that, they put the affair behind them.

Overall, neither viewed what happened as much of an issue. They just felt like acting more dramatic to liven up the conversation—their trust in each other was as strong as ever.

But the next problem they had to discuss was more serious in nature.

“Thanks. With that settled, there’s something I wanted to consult you about. Are you up to helping me figure out a solution?”

“Of course, my king! So what’s bothering you? If it’s about our remaining Mana, I believe we should still be safe with the minuscule cost associated with the amount of food you produced...”

“No, that’s not the problem. This is on an entirely different scale,” Takuto imparted with a grave expression.

Atou grew anxious over how much he seemed to be struggling to broach the topic. It could be said the concerns of her esteemed master easily eclipsed her own.

“Did something upset you, my king?”

“Not quite. You remember how we talked with the Dark Elves?”

“Yes...?”

Their abrupt encounter with Dark Elves wasn’t that long ago. Atou replayed the short conversation in her head, but as far as she could tell, they’d handled things well. They’d successfully deceived the Dark Elves into believing their side was stronger without revealing any of their cards.

No problems should’ve arisen from their encounter, but... Takuto’s concerns lay in an entirely different sphere of thinking.

“To tell you the truth, *er*, I struggled to speak...”

“How so?”

“Didn’t you notice, Atou? Even *I* thought it was a little strange.

I can hold a proper conversation with you, but I suddenly couldn't talk when other people showed up."

Atou replayed the events in her head again. She definitely thought his word choice was a little weird. But she chalked it up to him purposely being curt to stop from accidentally giving away too much information and ruining their act.

She'd simply assumed he was roleplaying as a powerful being who left all trivial talking to his minions. At the time, she'd even been so impressed, she'd thought, *My king is so impressive to pull this off on the spot!*

Sweat trickled down Atou's brow. What she sincerely hoped wasn't the case was about to come true.

"Come to think of it, I can't remember ever holding a decent conversation with the nurses and doctors at the hospital. I have basically no experience talking to others. I think there's a word for people who can only speak to people they are close to..."

"Oh no..."

Atou trembled. She shook from head to toe. She just remembered her master's previous life, the slightly troublesome sway it held over him now, and the colossal misunderstanding she'd been operating under.

"It seems that I have...a communication disorder..."

A single tear slipped from Takuto's right eye as he spoke. He had a burdensome affliction that made it difficult for him to communicate with strangers.

"Please don't cry, my king!!"

Atou rushed to his side faster than the eye could follow and clung to his arm. That was all she could do for him now.

Takuto wept over his inability to communicate. Atou also wept over the fact her master couldn't converse well with others.

Even for the Hero of Ruin, who'd once gained infinite power and destroyed the world in a single stroke, this was one enemy she couldn't defeat for her master.

Meanwhile, the King of Ruin let his grief run wild.

"I'm no king, Atou! It's far too lame to be the King of Ruin with such severe anxiety. I can't go on living!"

"It will be all right! Even if you can't speak to others, you'll be just fine as long as you talk to your Atou, my king! From this day forth, I shall become your exclusive speaker! I shall serve you for the rest of my days, so it'll all work out in the end!"

“Yeah, but how can an uncommunicative king give orders or negotiate with foreign nations? I need to *talk*, don’t I?”

Atou fell silent. She paled over failing to have the answers for him.

Tears streamed down Takuto’s cheeks again.

“I want a full life reset. Take my memories too! Let’s restart from scratch,” he moaned.

“It’s not that bad! You needn’t let it trouble you so! Kings don’t need to be verbose. Kings are solitary! They keep themselves above all vulgarity. You’re presenting the image of a powerful man who only speaks to his trustworthy subordinates!”

Had Atou ever raised her voice this loud before?

She projected her voice as loudly as she could to push through her argument and wash away her master’s apprehension. Although her words were just loud and unconvincing, she was fortunate that Takuto Ira was easily swayed by anything she said. As such, her frantic shouting managed to quell his depression.

“Aw, Atou! Thank you for trying so hard to cheer me up...”

“Don’t you fret, my king. We will slowly but surely rehabilitate you. You will *definitely* become capable of speaking to the masses. You have me! You have me, so please! Don’t think about starting a new game and erasing the past!”

“Yeah. Sorry. I guess I was feeling a little defeated. You’re right, though. I don’t have to be an excellent speaker when I have you.”

“Yes, yes! That’s the spirit. If *Eternal Nations* taught us anything, it’s that you can solve any problems in life as long as you have power and wealth!”

“Thank you, *Eternal Nations*. And thank you as well, Atou. I have the best confidant in the world...”

They hadn’t solved a single problem, but they both seemed satisfied with the answer they reached. And while it might be hard for someone else to understand, this conversation managed to tighten their bond.

As they gazed into each other’s eyes, they were filled with a torrent of emotion until they reached peak excitement.

“ATOOUUUUU!”

“KING TAKUTOOOOO!”

The dam holding them back broke, and they shared in a passionate embrace.

“GIGIGYEEEEH!!!”

A disturbing shriek interrupted their intimate moment.

“.....”

Still embracing, they looked over their shoulders to find Long-legged Bug oddly trembling behind them, watching them with its rolling eyeballs. They’d no idea what those grotesque eyes were trying to express, but it was horrific enough to shatter the moment.

“Oh yeah, I forgot I summoned him back to base.”

“Honestly, this bug can’t read the room. Shall we just recycle the unit?”

“That’d be a waste of Mana, so no.”

Having the bug present soured the mood—or rather, it brought them back to reality.

Takuto casually released Atou and perched on top of the stone dais. He would’ve rather stayed that way, but Long-legged Bug’s piercing gaze was unsettling. As for Atou, she was understandably upset.

“What do you *want* anyway, bug? Learn some tact, you blundering insect! King Takuto and I were in the midst of deepening our relationship.”

“GIGYEEH.”

“*Hm?* Oh, I see. It looks like the Dark Elves are close. They must’ve come to take the rest of the food.”

“Oh, right. I forgot about them.”

As the player, Takuto could sync his mind with the Long-legged Bug and its abilities. This particular Scout unit’s special ability expanded the player’s field of view. The ability worked even in the middle of a complex forest covered by the fog of war, letting Takuto see the Dark Elf clan approach them through its googly eyes.

Apprehension filled him. Like he’d just told Atou, he had serious communication problems. He wasn’t confident he could get through a second negotiation smoothly. But he had someone there to dashingly rescue him from this crisis—his confidant, Atou.

Immediately picking up on why he looked so stricken, she promptly offered a plan.

“An excellent idea just dawned on me. I shall take over any negotiations with those Dark Elves. All you have to do is watch!”

“Really? You don’t mind?”

“Really. Please entrust this task to me. In my humble opinion, you will come across as more dignified by remaining a man of few

words.”

“Hmm...Mmm...” he groaned.

Takuto was grateful for the offer. He would love to leave the negotiations to her. But was that really something he should permit? He was King and she his subordinate. He didn't care about hierarchy, but he worried his attitude about these things might put more of a burden on Atou.

“Or do you find me lacking, my king?”

Atou held her hand over her heart, her expression brimming with confidence that silently told him to trust her.

Takuto was secretly relieved by her reaction and also ashamed for underestimating her ability.

What did he have to fear? She was Mynoghra's legendary hero, Sludge Atou.

The Hero of Ruin annihilates all enemies and crushes every obstacle underfoot.

The girl of infinite possibilities and limitless power was asking him to leave the task to her.

There was but one answer for the King who'd been given absolute trust and loyalty.

“You lack nothing, Atou. Can I entrust this to you?”

“Hehehe! Your every wish is my command, my king.”

Crimson eyes locked onto him as she swept into a deep bow. Her bewitching expression brimmed with absolute confidence, suitable for a hero who would bring ruin to the world.



“**THANK** you for granting us the honor of being in your mighty presence, O Great One. I am Moltar Cordal Mazaram, chief of the Dark Elf clan you generously bestowed mercy upon.”

A Dark Elf detachment showed up before Takuto shortly after he learned of their approach from his scout. They were led by a weather-beaten old man. He wore his silver hair and beard long and proud, though they were ravaged by the effects of malnutrition.

He lowered himself to his knees before Takuto and Atou, with his battered staff thrust into the ground for support.

Beside him was Dark Elf Warrior Captain Gia, who they'd met yesterday. Seeing as Takuto recognized most of the faces there, they

appeared to have selected the same members for this mission.

But having a different leader now changed their demeanor. Or perhaps they'd discussed how to act beforehand.

Atou gave a satisfied nod to return their proper greeting.

"Good. You know proper manners for a Dark Fae. Don't beat around the Flesh Tree. I can tell you came here for a reason. Out with it."

"I heard our younglings behaved without manners during your prior meeting. Allow me to apologize and also extend my sincerest gratitude on behalf of my clan for kindly providing us with much-needed rations."

"...It is only natural for underdeveloped Dark Fae to lose their presence of mind before a mighty being. My king is not so narrow-minded as to let trivial things affect him."

Manners can make or break certain situations. Those in power are obligated to dole out appropriate punishment for lapses in decorum. Thus, it was only proper to show some displeasure and offer a word of warning regarding their behavior.

Atou, however, was only interested in Takuto and nothing else. One glance in his direction told her he wasn't bothered by their offense either.

Why would he be when he was a normal young man from a modern land?

He didn't place much value on strict forms of politeness. Thus, she applied no personal feelings to something he'd determined wasn't a problem.

As far as this matter was concerned, Atou could indeed be called Takuto's loyal pawn.

The fact that the Dark Elves invaded the Accursed Lands without permission was left unquestioned, and their behavior was also dismissed as trivial.

In reality, they didn't actually have the authority to be treating the Dark Elves this way, but Elder Moltar had no way of knowing this as he lowered his head to show his gratitude for their lenience.

"Our entire race is ashamed of our pettiness before your generous benevolence. Please grant us the honor of knowing your name, so that we may pass down the tale of the great debt of gratitude we owe you forevermore."

Atou turned her head toward Takuto. She was seeking his permission to tell them his name.

He never did give his name during their last encounter. While part of it had to do with his lack of social skills, it was also due to his decision not to provide more information than necessary. But his opinion changed after taking some time to think about it.

Rather than live a miserable life cowering in fear, he might as well grab life by the horns, even if that was the riskier option.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained—that was one life lesson the game had taught him. With that in mind, he permitted Atou to answer them.

Atou had but one thing to do now that she had his stamp of approval. She took a small breath and proclaimed his name with imposing pomp.

“You are in the presence of King Takuto Ira, the Ruler of Ruin, Lord of the Apocalypse. Remember his great and noble name! When referring to him, you shall address him as King Ira or King Takuto Ira.”

The Dark Elves’ heads sank even deeper with Atou’s proclamation.

Takuto’s name was now known, and it became engraved in their hearts along with fear and awe.

Atou nodded with satisfaction.

This was how Takuto’s name first became known in this world.

It was at Atou’s sole discretion she introduced him as Takuto Ira, the Lord of the Apocalypse. She purposely made a point of preventing them from calling him Takuto because she understood the special relationship calling someone by their first name entailed.

By doing so, she drove home the relationship she had with her master before everyone present. And it was because she was busy coming up with such schemes that she missed what Takuto hadn’t—the elder Dark Elf shuddered upon hearing the title she gave him.

“Oh, and my name is Atou. Be sure not to address me with the same formality as King Takuto. He is the Supreme King deserving of respect at all times—I am just his loyal subordinate. You are welcome to forget my name.”

“King Takuto Ira and Lady Atou... I have etched your glorious names into these weary bones. I swear I will impart this knowledge to the rest of the clan so that they too will engrave your names into their very souls.”

“Excellent. Now take your food and be gone. Most of it won’t

last indefinitely. Just because my king can produce infinite amounts with a wave of his hand does not justify letting good food go to waste.”

Atou sounded bored with them, which was actually true; she’d already lost interest in negotiating. She only existed for her master, Takuto. She understood that like the back of her hand and wanted it just as bad.

She wouldn’t even care to speak to others if it wasn’t for him. The sooner these talks were over with, the sooner her master would praise her.

“P-Please wait! You see, we discussed how we can repay the King for saving us and were wondering if he wants us to pay tribute?”

The Dark Elf chief poured cold water all over Atou’s wishes to be in her king’s arms. It seemed they weren’t finished talking yet.

Atou frowned and pondered their unusual request since it wasn’t a grave enough offense to upset her.

“You wish to pay tribute? *Ha*. Can you provide something that will satisfy my king?”

“I am ashamed to admit it, but we are too ignorant to even imagine what might please the mighty King Takuto Ira. May we first hear directly from His Majesty what he—”

“I see. You have nothing we need then. You are in no position to offer anything anyway.”

Atou waved them off, sighing as she shook her head.

They’d offered to pay tribute, but Atou highly doubted starving refugees had anything of value. Of course, she couldn’t completely deny the possibility of them possessing a rare item such as Artifacts. Even with that slight chance hanging in the background, she chose to prioritize removing them from her king’s presence.

At the beginning of the game, when the player’s empire is still in the fragile, foundation-building stage, even the smallest missteps can prove fatal.

Atou was most wary of the Dark Elves bringing their problems to Takuto. In particular, she feared the people who’d chased them out of their territory and continued to hunt them becoming Takuto’s problem.

“We might not be, but...if we don’t—”

“I told you we don’t need your tribute.”

“You did, but—”

“What are you being so elusive about? My king is a busy man. Are you scheming something?”

“I would never!”

Atou’s annoyance showed, eliciting visible panic from the Dark Elves. After all, she didn’t try to hide or suppress the jet-black murderous aura seeping from her.

Atou’s passive abilities—Hero, Evil, and Fanatic—each had the effect of multiplying her basic combat strength. And with her special ability to steal abilities from the units she defeated, she had the potential to grow stronger with each battle.

The Dark Elves, on the other hand, were too starved to make use of their full strength. In their current state, Atou could easily wipe the field with them. If she wanted to, she could cut down the Mage and Warrior units, then go wipe out the entire Dark Elf clan in less than ten minutes.

And that cold-blooded murder would prove very beneficial to her and Takuto if ethics were thrown to the wind.

Yep, this is taking a really bad turn!

Takuto quickly abandoned his wishful thinking that these talks would end peacefully. As it was, Atou had drawn a critically wrong opinion about the Dark Elves. Her attitude toward them was extremely negative, and looking at it objectively, she came across as a subordinate whose life was made more difficult by having to deal with her king’s whims.

Just speaking with them was unpleasant for her, but she had taken on that role per her king’s wishes. Hence, she tried to bring the conversation to a close to quickly get rid of the nuisance. It was only natural for her to view the situation that way.

On the other hand, the Dark Elves couldn’t let things end that quick. This negotiation was make-or-break for the pitiful clan. It was a turning point that would determine their fate. Even if this single encounter lengthened their lives, there was no next time.

They’d no food and no guarantee they would find a safe place to live. Therefore, even if they seemed a little suspicious, it was quite natural for them to actively try to negotiate with Takuto and Atou.

Of course, Takuto didn’t blame Atou for having a narrow-minded view that was laser-focused on him when he could analyze everything objectively from the dais. But he also wasn’t going to

permit a battle in their present situation.

Deciding he needed to step in, Takuto cleared his throat and raised his voice despite his nervousness.

“Atou.”

“Yes, my king?”

Atou was quick to respond. She whipped around at the sound of her name and flew to Takuto’s side faster than an arrow. Then she placed her hands on the dais and leaned her face close to his.

Her displeasure was apparent on the cute pouty expression she made sure only he could see. She also seemed frustrated that the conversation wasn’t going anywhere. She brought her lips to his ears so only he could hear her whirlwind of complaints.

“King TA-KU-TO! These people *suck* at negotiating! They also seem to be plotting something! They’re bad people. Let’s kill them. Let’s kill them all!” she whispered vehemently.

“Now, now, let’s not be hasty...!”

Takuto stopped just short of saying, “*You* didn’t do a great job negotiating either.”

She’d started off fine, but had derailed into being a bit unacceptable toward the end. Then again, he was even worse, having pushed the whole matter on his young-looking subordinate, just because he had trouble talking to strangers.

Regardless, it was undeniable that Atou and the Dark Elves had gotten off on the wrong foot. Atou seemingly wanted to be rid of them quick, but the Dark Elf chief had good reason not to back down.

Her attitude all but screamed not to approach them again. Trying to forcefully end the conversation flustered them even further. She only acted that way to put as little social pressure on Takuto as possible, but it only fostered a greater misunderstanding between both parties.

“They’ll only cause harm if you let them live! Annihilating every last one of them here and now is best! They deserve to have their heads hanging from a pike for all to see, King Takuto!”

“Whoa, hold your horses! Listen, I’m sure they want to negotiate with us—they’re offering tribute! You know how we’re an *evil* civilization? Don’t you think they’re acting a little funny because they’re suspicious of our motives for helping them?”

“Oh! That’s a good point! Then what *should* we do next?”

“Let’s ask for something in return to convince them the debt is

paid. That way, they can feel reassured and be more comfortable opening up about what they really want. But man, that old elf is pretty interesting.”

I want to enjoy talking with them more too, Takuto thought. He wasn’t starved for conversation by any means, but the Dark Elves piqued his interest.

Atou looked at Takuto, who’d seen right through to the core of the issue, with adoration twinkling in her eyes, and she confidently responded in a much happier mood.

“Y-You never cease to amaze me, my king! I’m awed by your insight! I completely understand what you want now. Please leave the rest to me. I will take care of everything.”

“Hey! Wait!”

Atou spun around and returned to the negotiating table.

There’s no way she understands...

Takuto knew that, but was afflicted by the greatest game penalty—the inability to communicate. He’d no choice but to leave negotiations to her.

“*Hehe*. So *that’s* what this is all about. Now I understand...” Atou crooned seductively. “I swear, you people are so foolish I don’t know what to do with you.”

The Dark Elves lowered their heads even closer to the ground, sensing something sinister in her sudden shift.

“I would have *never* noticed if my king hadn’t pointed it out. To think you see King Takuto as no different from some measly evil spirit.”

“N-No! We wouldn’t dare! Believe me, Benevolent One!”

“Silence. My king’s word is absolute. And rejoice: he has taken your tasteless suggestion into consideration and deemed you Dark Fae worthy of a contract. Put simply, we *will* receive some kind of tribute in exchange for the food. Satisfied? Your kind should understand a contract with us is absolute. Are you relieved now?”

“Y-Yes, milady! Thank you very much for your gracious compassion.”

Moltar simply expressed his gratitude without refuting Atou’s speculation further. He did so partly because he knew the dangers of acknowledging what he thought of her king and because he realized the longer he spoke with Atou, the more hostility they earned from her.

“Then we need to receive something of equal value. *Hmm*,

what do you have of value to us...?"

Atou twirled toward Takuto, her angelic eyes pleading with him. He knew what she wanted without her asking. Her eyes begged, "Help me, King Takuto!"

Ditz...

Takuto's impression of Atou nearly suffered a blow because of how quickly she gave up after talking smack, but he adored her so much, any blunders she made were neutralized by his special feelings for her. It turned out that while Atou could be his spokeswoman, he'd have to make all the important decisions when it came down to it.

"Ask about the outside world."

"My king is interested in the outside world. You people came from a faraway land, yes? Tell us everything you know about the greater world. We shall view that as compensation for the food and consider the contract complete. Is that satisfactory?"

"Absolutely! In that case, this old man shall offer you everything I have learned over my many years."

Joy showed on Moltar's face for the first time. He and his people were overcome with relief to be asked for the cheapest form of compensation imaginable. This was never a problem they had to worry themselves ragged over if they hadn't been operating under a big misunderstanding.

Why is she so good at interpreting what I desire but turns utterly useless when I leave everything to her?

Takuto contemplated the reasons for Atou's curious behavior, but it wasn't a question with a set answer, so he forced himself to just accept it for what it was.

Negotiations were now well on their way to an amicable close. But he'd noticed something that made him question if this was *all* they wanted.

"You must leave this forest after our contract is fulfilled."

"Y-Yes, milady."

Oh, that shook him.

Atou didn't pick up on it as usual, but Takuto didn't miss the apparent dismay flashing across Moltar's face. This helped Takuto swiftly put together the pieces and figure out what they wanted based on how they reacted.

"We will permit you temporary asylum. You likely need time to recuperate before moving on. However, you cannot stay long.

Remember that.”

The life of an exile can't be easy. They probably don't have anywhere else to get food after what I gave them runs out.

During his last, sudden meeting with the Dark Elves, they'd mentioned they were driven out of their land. According to Long-legged Bug's report, their clan had around five hundred members, which wasn't an easy number to suddenly convert into nomads.

Offering Takuto tribute was probably also meant to improve their standing with him. He was certain they were there to use this opportunity to negotiate permission to reside in this forest and receive food from him regularly.

Them staying too long is honestly a nuisance. Refugees from a different alignment will only hinder building our empire. Plus, there's no guarantee they won't bring trouble to our door.

Just like in the real world, racial differences cause various conflicts in *Eternal Nations*. People with different cultures, mindsets, and ideas of good and evil are destined to clash.

Takuto had no intention of stupidly pushing hot coal under the rug, only for it to cause a fire later.

“We would be eternally grateful if His Majesty permitted us to reside in this forest long-term—”

“We can't permit that. This land belongs to my king, and he desires peace and quiet. Oh, and one more thing: if you don't want to throw away the lives we saved this day, don't mention this place to anyone else.”

So that's what they were after. Before any other problem, there's the issue of the territory belonging to Mynoghra eventually becoming cursed. In-game, cursed land has a negative status effect on good and neutral aligned units. I have no idea what it'll do in a real-life setting, though.

That was the primary reason why Takuto didn't actively stop Atou from trying to drive the Dark Elf clan from the forest.

Cursed territories are advantageous for evil races. They provide various civilization benefits, but they are always disadvantageous when interacting with neutral and good aligned civilizations.

Of course, Takuto had no way of knowing if things worked the same way as in-game. Maybe there wouldn't be an issue. He definitely needed to test to be sure. But Takuto was strangely convinced that the game mechanics did indeed apply to this world.

For those reasons, as much as he hated to do it, he needed them to leave.

But I'd feel so awful just up and abandoning them. I'll feel horrible if they go off and die in a ditch somewhere after I gave them food.

Takuto may have given them food on a whim, but that was produced with Mana he couldn't replenish yet.

Were they about to go on an aimless journey and die after he'd prolonged their lives with his limited resources?

That was just as bad as them being a nuisance. Rather than sympathy, he was frustrated by the idea of his actions becoming meaningless.

"W-Well then, Great King Takuto Ira, thank you for permitting us to have an audience with you. Men, as we are before His Majesty, be sure to quietly carry away the food."

Is there another way to solve this?

The talks were about to end.

Elder Moltar and the Dark Elf Warriors seemingly decided not to risk Atou's wrath by arguing the point. Their exhausted faces spoke differently, however.

Mynoghra's King—a being who should possess infinite power.

As the man who'd been called *Eternal Nations'* legendary top player, Takuto felt as if he was being put to the test—that if he failed here, he'd be mocked as incompetent.

"Hey, you guys."

As soon as the words left his lips, Takuto had found his answer. He finally realized how game-changing the civilization of Mynoghra was and his own power as its king. If he felt like it, this wasn't a problem he needed to waste precious time mulling over.

"Become my citizens."

Takuto had found an ingenious way to solve everything. Deep down, he was confident this option was possible. He almost wanted to laugh at himself for not thinking of it sooner.

But what met Takuto when he looked at the people before him with a confident smile turning up the corner of his lips were slack jaws and eyes that seemed to ask, "Are you crazy?"

The Dark Elves naturally questioned his sanity, but even Atou gave him the same look. He immediately realized he'd massively screwed up presenting his plan and fought back his tears as his inability to express himself reared its ugly head again.

Dark Mage (Elder Moltar)

Magic Unit

Strength: 3 Move: 1

《Sage》

《Dark Magic Lv.1》

《Starved》



Description

～ A skilled Knight does the work of a hundred Warriors, while a skilled Mage does the work of a hundred Knights. ～

Dark Mages are experienced magic units that have been upgraded from Mage. If they have the necessary amount of Mana, they can learn Tactical Spells up to Lv.2 and sway the battle to your advantage.

The downside is their minuscule strength, which requires them to be guarded by other units.

Some mage units may acquire the 《Sage》 ability.

Silence fell over the clearing—everyone was trying to figure out what the King meant.

Takuto didn't think his comment would command this much attention, and he was hit by a tidal wave of remorse. It's often said that introverts become depressed when they recall conversations they've had with others. Takuto was a perfect example; he quickly regretted saying anything at all.

"Wh-What was that, King Takuto?" Atou queried.

Takuto remained silent. He actually wanted to be left alone to wallow in his misery, but Atou wouldn't stand for that. She needed to confirm what he wanted and how to proceed with the negotiations from there.

"P-Pardon me. I need to speak with my king. Stay where you are. Do not draw any unfounded conclusions in the meantime!" Atou hastily ordered Moltar and the warriors, her expression distraught from Takuto dropping such an unexpected bomb.

Seeing the panic on her face as she approached made Takuto wish he could start this game over again. He'd made too many sloppy moves from the start; he wanted a clean reset.

He always did that when a game map got off to a bad start, but unfortunately for him, this world wasn't a videogame. There was no new game menu. And so he was stuck explaining himself to Atou, who demanded an explanation.

"Wh-Wh-What are you thinking?!" she whispered.

"E-Exactly what I said. I thought we could just make them our citizens. C'mon, don't look so shocked. It makes me feel worse... Sorry I suck at talking."

"Y-Your comment was fine... But those *things* are neutrally aligned, you know?"

"So they are," Takuto hummed, rubbing his chin with his hand.

Although he was just beating himself over screwing up, Atou's shocked expression was quite funny, which had the mysterious effect of calming his restless mind. Once he stopped panicking, he swiftly weighed the pros and cons of his suggestion and felt confident that his offer was based on sound logic.

Takuto stared at himself reflected in Atou's uncertain eyes and explained his plan to her as if speaking to a child.

"I want to use the Refugee skill to recruit them. Remember

how that was part of the game?”

“I do. But I worry about the conflicts that might arise when we produce Mynoghra’s main race, the Homunculus.”

Civilizations in *Eternal Nations* are assigned various races, such as Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Demons, etc. These distinctly different races each possess their own goals and dispositions, adding extra flare to the game, especially with the ability for races to immigrate and become refugees in another civilization.

The complex nature and variety of playstyles were a part of this game’s appeal. And naturally, that meant Mynoghra also had its own unique race. Suggestively named Homunculus, the race boasted even more germane characteristics than its name.

“Okay, Atou, I want you to remember exactly what the Homunculus look like,” Takuto gently instructed, bringing unfounded relief to his perplexed subordinate.

Regaining her calm, Atou pulled out the information she’d mentally filed away about the Homunculus and blanched.



Homunculus

Race

《Race Traits》

Population Bonus	+ 20%
Mana Production Bonus	− 20%
Resource Production Bonus	+ 20%
Food Production Bonus	+ 20%
Research Bonus	− 20%

“Those things are soulless, after all. They’ve a high fertility rate and great food and resource bonuses, but that comes at a price—crappily low Mana and technological development. They’ll be more of a disadvantage than anything while we can’t aggressively expand our empire.”

Atou was well-aware of the downsides Takuto laid out. While the Homunculus were a race that specialized in one thing and failed at everything else, they were a powerful asset with the right strategy.

Takuto and Atou had plenty of experience working with various strategies to tackle every situation thrown at them. It wouldn’t be difficult for them to develop a tactic to incorporate the Homunculus in their plans for world conquest, once they were ready to produce them with Mana. Except they took an entirely different issue with their use.

“Think back on the Homunculus’s character designs, Atou. Can you really stand looking at *that* forever?”

The Dark Elves jumped when Takuto glanced and pointed in their general direction. What he was actually pointing to was the Long-Legged Bug hiding behind them in defense mode. Its googly eyes seemed to gawp at them as they rolled around in their sockets.

Atou was immediately reminded of Mynoghra’s native race in the early stages—bulging eyes, disproportionate body parts, constantly quivering whether they stood still or moved, just like their bug scout, except in deformed humanoid form.

“*Ugh!* Double *ugh!* I forgot Homunculus look like extremely deformed humans because they tried to imitate humanity to blend in better. Seeing them in the flesh is liable to make me puke...”

Things that were originally suitable for game graphics appeared frighteningly realistic here. What someone can tolerate and even enjoy in a game is entirely different from wanting to experience it in real life.

It was hard to estimate the kind of mental damage it’d do to them, living with those disgusting creatures every day. Atou, at least, had misgivings about the adverse effects on both of them from running a country full of googly-eyed, slimy citizens.

“And there are advantages to accepting the Dark Elves as citizens too. It’s always been a struggle balancing the inefficiency of Mynoghra’s research-related facilities. With them on our side, our

research speed will no longer be a problem.”

One of Mynoghra’s civilization traits is getting access to the Homunculus race. The player can expand their empire at an explosive speed using Homunculus with their fast reproductive rate, high productivity, and minuscule penalties for decreased citizen happiness and hygiene.

This allows the player to take advantage of one of the best benefits of being an evil civilization: the ability to forcibly expand industry without worrying about pollution tanking citizen happiness.

These are the traits and strengths unique to playing as Mynoghra. The downside is the huge handicap placed on research and development, putting them massively behind other empires when it comes to technological advancement as a way to balance the game.

But it’d be a different story if they invited the suffering Dark Elves to join their empire. Their presence would effectively counter any research penalties. And obviously, Takuto could still produce Homunculus as long as he had sufficient Mana.

Meaning it was still possible to secure explosive fertility and productivity generated by soulless drones. Going by the notion of there being a right person for every job, inviting them was a smart move.

In the game, Mynoghra’s evil alignment made it extremely difficult to accept immigrants and other races, but this situation might classify as a lucky random event in their favor.

“They’ll bring a lot of benefits to our empire, but even more than that is...well, you know?” Takuto said, bringing them back to the top of grotesque looks and zombie-like citizens.

“I strongly believe citizens capable of civilized conversation are a necessity for our great Mynoghra. Or rather, for my mental health...”

“What a coincidence. I was just thinking the exact same thing!”

Takuto’s proposal, which was initially considered insane, actually went over well when he explained it. There was never a problem with his strategy, only confusion evoked by his poor choice of words.

As good of a plan as it was, the potential results were unknown. Atou still had reservations.

“But will they function as proper citizens?” she asked.

“We won’t know until we try. There might be game limitations we don’t know about. As long as they maintain a certain degree of happiness, there shouldn’t be any trouble—I think.”

“Do you think this is a game world? It doesn’t feel quite the same to me...”

Atou had absolute faith in Takuto. If that was her king’s conclusion, then it must be true.

Still, they didn’t know much about this world. She was concerned about any potential deviances from the game world creating dangerous problems for them down the line.

“Well, we can figure that out as we go. Either way, we’ll be able to get a lot of information from them. Let’s solve the problem at hand for now. Do I have your support in this, Atou?”

“There are too many uncertain factors... *Ngh*... I can’t decide what is right. I’m sorry.”

At that moment, Takuto thought Atou’s behavior was very game-like. She was quick to act when she understood what he wanted, but dangerously slow when it came to making a decision herself.

She probably wasn’t aware of it, but Takuto sensed there was something at a fundamental level interfering with her and causing this unnatural indecisiveness. But he wasn’t going to point it out to her. It wasn’t that big a deal to him. He was happy as long as he had her, and Atou was satisfied as long as she had him.

“Don’t sweat it. I’m the king and you’re my subordinate. It’s my job to make the hard decisions. Let’s accept them into our empire as citizens.”

“Your decision has cleared up all my doubts. I shall inform them of your decree—*um*, is it all right if I do that?”

Her unconfident question embodied the shame she felt at not being more helpful. Frustrated that he wasn’t better at expressing himself and not wanting her to ever lose confidence, Takuto put on his best smile. This was a sign of affection he only ever showed her.

“You don’t even have to ask. Who else would do it? I’m counting on you.”

“Please leave everything to me, my king.”

With their private talk finally over, Atou faced the Dark Elves.

Entirely unaware of the contents of their conversation, the Dark Elves could only anxiously await the King’s decree, as handed

down by Atou.

“My king meant exactly what he said.”

“L-Lady Atou, could you please explain what His Majesty is thinking in terms we can understand in our ignorance?”

“My king is going to build an empire. If you become his citizens, he will guarantee your safety under his mercy and might.”

Elder Moltar and the rest were taken aback by this unforeseen proposal. Before coming, they’d considered all the different situations that might occur during negotiations with the King of Ruin and prepared their responses. But they never could’ve prepared for this.

“My king knows all. He laments the situation you are in and has shown you his great mercy. Nothing more, nothing less,” Atou declared like a thunderclap.

Through her tone and word choice, she was essentially asserting there was nothing more to it than that while also warning them not to question his decision.

But Moltar and the Dark Elves were too busy racking their brains trying to decide how to respond to the King’s abrupt proposal to heed her.

“I tremble with joy before the great King’s boundless mercy... Pardon my rudeness, but may I inquire what will happen to us if we were to become his citizens?”

“I wish I could promise eternal happiness to you, but that’s not what you want to know, is it? To put it simply, you would become *evil*.”

Everyone was stunned.

Atou came right out in the open and gave them a clean and concise answer. It was easy to understand. Her meaning was clear. But, at the same time, it was such a preposterous and life-changing statement.

“Yep, that’s right.”

Elder Moltar’s gaze unknowingly went to the King, who was nodding along quite happily with his subordinate’s response, like it made all the sense in the world. Not even an old sage who’d lived two hundred years could be easily convinced by this simplified explanation that they’d just become evil.

“Perhaps it would be more appropriate to explain in greater detail, but we aren’t obligated to do that for your people at this time.”

Atou deliberately condensed the explanation. They weren't Mynoghra's citizens yet, and they could still reject joining.

Naturally, she'd every intention of slaughtering them all the instant they spurned her king's mercy to keep word from getting out. Still, she decided sowing unnecessary worry in them by sharing that bit of information was pointlessly foolish.

Besides, Takuto had said he'd welcome them as citizens. All they had to do was joyously accept, making tedious explanations a waste of time anyway.

"The decision is yours. I have nothing further to say. Whichever you choose is your destiny."

The Dark Elves didn't seem to realize her usage of "destiny" included whether they lived or died based on their reply.

Atou had absolute faith Takuto would solve any empire-management problems that might arise one way or another. With that said, she placed great importance on her king's interests. It wouldn't hurt for things to play out in the best direction for all parties.

So she hummed aloud, her fingers lightly placed on her lips as she gazed thoughtfully into the distance before saying, "But in my personal opinion, this side is surprisingly fun."

An eerily kind smile crossed her face.

Chapter 6: Founding of a New Empire

THE Dark Elf clan discussed the matter for three days and three nights. It was just too outlandish and life-altering not to tread with great care.

They had received enough food to start recovering, although not entirely. Their newfound stamina was burned not wasting any time sleeping as they heatedly debated whether to become the King's citizens or not.

The one who had bestowed food upon them claimed to be the legendary being known as the King of Ruin. It was true they were in dire straits, but they were apprehensive about happily going along with his offer and becoming citizens just like that.

This being was not like the hundreds of run-of-the-mill kings they'd served in the past either. According to Elder Moltar's tales, he was the king of the apocalypse who would eventually destroy the world and return everything back to nothingness.

His power was fathomless and impossible for mortals to resist.

Once they formed a contract with him, it was highly likely even their souls would belong to him.

Most of the clan gave their opinion regarding this ultimate choice where even liberation by death wouldn't be possible once they decided. Needless to say, every adult in the clan was consulted, and children of a certain age were included. Even toddlers who'd just learn to speak were forced to make a decision.

The only ones excluded were the babies who slept against their mother's chest.

After a long debate, they unanimously decided to become the King's subjects.

They had no future. It was better to survive, even if that meant falling into the hands of evil than to sit by and wait for death.

Most of all, they couldn't forget the mercy that satiated their hunger. Whether that mercy came from an evil being or the harbinger of the end times, it mattered not compared to the

outstanding debt of gratitude they owed.

At long last, everyone felt like a weight had been lifted off their shoulders with their crucial decision made. They were also convinced their lives were about to change for good.



THE Dark Elves had made that fateful decision two days ago. And it was today that their very souls would forever remember what the result would bring.

The King would soon come to their encampment. Ordinarily, they'd go to him, but it was decided, per Atou's suggestion, that the King would meet them there as it'd be more of a nuisance to have a group of five hundred traipsing through the forest to see him.

An unsettling quiet hung over the air. Nobody verbalized how they felt, but a mixture of anxiety, hope, and fear filled everyone.

Every Dark Elf knelt on the ground, waiting for their new master with their heads bowed. Per Elder Moltar's decision, his people were better off not looking at the King and risking a bad first impression.

Before long, they heard the sound of twigs breaking underfoot and two pairs of footsteps approaching.

"The King has come," Elder Moltar told his clan just as two figures appeared from the forest depths.

Despite countless warnings from their Chief and Warrior Captain not to look directly at the King, several of the younger Dark Elves lifted their heads, curiosity getting the better of them. They were overcome with regret as soon as they did, as absolute fear chilled them to the bone.

They had looked at pure darkness—darkness in human form.

It was as if something had gone horribly wrong in the world, giving birth to this distorted dark stain incapable of purification. Something too eerie for words was before them.

The being they were about to revere as their king was the incarnation of ruin.

The faint of heart let out a strangled whimper, getting elbowed by the person beside them.

The younglings' survival instincts kicked in, causing them to stifle their cries and bury their faces in their mothers' chests.

Even the brave warriors could not hide their fearful shudders.

Only the people who held to their chief's warning found themselves spared from the worst effects. The young ones who dared look wet themselves, some even swooning with drool dribbling from their mouths.

They had absolutely no idea what he was thinking—that was their sole impression of Takuto Ira.

But they had decided to become citizens of the empire created by the King of Ruin. Their exile brought them to establish their home here, where they would live new lives under the protection of this ink-black being.

Atou, the King's direct subordinate, exchanged a few words with Elder Moltar and listened to his brief explanation about the throne. The King then sat upon the misshapen throne the Dark Elves had hastily prepared for this occasion and gave a half nod to the girl waiting at his side.

"We shall now welcome the Dark Elf clan present here today as immigrants to Mynoghra," the girl announced in a clear and powerful voice that traveled well despite not speaking loudly. "Do you approve, King Takuto Ira?"

The King gave a contented nod and said **"Okay.' I welcome you"** in response.

The instant the King's words entered their bodies through their ears, they felt their very souls being caressed, and an internal chill froze them from the inside out.

"Congratulations. You are now officially citizens of Mynoghra. In the name of our great King, Takuto Ira, all happiness and peace will be promised to you."

With that, Atou's proclamation, filled with an unseen power, came to an end, and the tenseness in the air eased somewhat. Perhaps she had been slightly nervous too because once she finished, she broke into a broad smile.

A strange silence followed.

"C-Captain, is the ceremony over now?" the legend-loving adjutant Emle asked Gia in a hushed whisper.

"It should be. But they haven't said anything else. What should we do now?"

Not only did they have little experience with such rituals, but

they also didn't feel like they had become Mynoghra's citizens—or rather, evil beings.

What was going on?

Neither the King nor his subordinate made any moves as they seemed to be waiting for something.

Should they just stay as they were for a while longer? Were they going to hear a speech from their new king? Kneeling this long was starting to hurt their legs. Such thoughts plagued the minds of every Dark Elf, including Emle, when suddenly—

Their hearts hammered in their ears as unbearable rage welled up from within. It was the hatred of all living things. It was the simmering, burning hatred of all who persecuted, hurt, and ridiculed them as worthless.

Now, if the King ordered them to, they'd be happy to kill all living things. Wrath unlike anything they had experienced before inflicted both confusion and intense agony on the Dark Elves.

At the same time, they were enveloped by powerful emotions that drowned out the boiling hatred. Those miserable feelings of hate and anger, which dominated their hearts like the raging rapids of an overflowing river, became more like the babbling of a peaceful brook compared to this new emotion wrapping them up like a warm blanket.

These pacifying feelings came from but one source. Every Dark Elf's gaze settled there—upon their king, Takuto Ira, who would destroy everything for them.

“Are you okay?”

At last, they finally understood the truth about their king with their souls.

The King was worried about them.

They now knew he gave them food because he was deeply sympathetic to their circumstances, and that act was out of pure mercy with no strings attached. From the beginning, the King had no intention of hurting them.

Why, he was compassionately watching over them as they endured their hearts' painful transformation. Knowing that filled them with the joy of being protected for the first time in their lives.

It brought them infinite relief that came from the deepest darkness. They were delighted the great King of Ruin deigned to look at them. They were convinced all their enemies would fall before the King, leaving a field of corpses in their wake.

They brimmed with endless joy that they finally had a place to return to after all the hardships and tragedy they'd experienced. Every kind of emotion swirled within them like a raging storm, eventually transforming into a maelstrom of heated passion.

Fanaticism had been born within them, along with loyalty on par with the debt of gratitude they owed.

At this very moment, the Dark Elves were reborn and transformed into the evil citizens of Mynoghra.

"A-All hail our great and mighty king, Takuto Ira!" one of the younger Dark Elves cheered with his hands in the air. He was the same pathetic man who'd wet himself earlier. But now he just felt pride and excitement before his king.

His excitement quickly spread to the people around him, eventually engulfing the entire group in a maelstrom of enthusiasm.

Even Warrior Captain Gia and Elder Moltar showered Takuto with praise as tears of joy streamed down their cheeks. Atou stood at his side, nodding in satisfaction, as if their reaction was only natural.

All devotion is given to my king. All fanaticism revolves around my king, she thought.

In response to everything they said to him, the great King of Ruin took it all in stride and simply said, "**Cool.**"

SYSTEM MESSAGE

Due to the sudden influx of citizens, an empire was created under a great commander. Hail Mynoghra!

OK



Alignment : Evil

Selectable Commanders

Nameless Evil God

Sludge Atou

Isla, Queen of Bugs

Distinct Features

《Apocalypse》

《Encroachment》

《Domestic Affairs》

NO IMAGE

Description

～ The empire of an unnamed god that brings about ruin. ～

The origins of Mynoghra are unknown.

It is said to have existed in this world before it was born and that it was created by an unnamed evil god who came from a different dimension from the holy god Arlos.

This empire thrives in evil terrains, which increase its productivity.

You can play the game more favorably by tilting the world's inclination toward evil, but you must be careful as this process starts off very slow.

Chapter 7: Technology

TAKUTO and Atou had taken their first steps into this new world after safely establishing their empire. They left the Dark Elf—their citizens’—settlement and returned to the familiar stone dais where their expressions became the grimmest yet.

“We’ve hit a wall.”

“A big, hard wall.”

Atou echoed Takuto’s murmured sentiment from where she sat beside him on the dais. They sighed in unison. Long-legged Bug’s eerie cry echoed in the distance.

“I had a blast spending time with you, Atou.”

“I also enjoyed being with you, King Takuto.”

Takuto gazed into her eyes and said his farewells with a weary grin. Meanwhile, Atou, having already come to terms with their future, gently squeezed his hands with a fleeting smile.

Silence hung between them, followed by the indescribable looks on their faces. Overcome with emotion, they rolled off the dais onto the grassy ground without worrying about sullyng their clothes.

“The two biggest empires on this continent are hardcore good-aligned!” Takuto ranted. “What the hell?!”

“Even worse, one is a Human empire that worships a holy god, and the other is a nature-worshipping Elven empire! They’ll come for our heads the moment we’re discovered! It’ll be a complete case of ‘Nice to meet you. Now die, evil abominations!’”

This was the new problem which killed their motivation and excitement. What they’d learned about their neighboring nations from Elder Moltar put their newly founded empire of Mynoghra at a crippling disadvantage.

Humans and Elves—not only were they two races with horrendous starting relations with evil beings, but both of their empires were good-aligned too. To make matters even worse, they were hegemonic empires with advanced civilizations that encompassed large territories.

And just to make a bad situation even worse, Takuto and Atou didn't recognize the names of either empire or the continent they were on.

A strange new land in a strange new world surrounded by potential unknown enemies.

They were crushed so tightly between a rock and a hard place, their situation couldn't even be defined by a difficulty level anymore; they were stepping beyond Nightmare mode.

"I *hate* this map! This start point sucks so bad!"

"Let's start a new game! We should start over, my king! I hate this setup too!! My motivation died with the lack of starter Resources! I mean, what's the big idea? This bloody forest can't produce any Food, Mineral, or Mana!"

If being surrounded on either side by extremely hostile empires wasn't bad enough, the Accursed Lands, where they'd "spawned in," had practically no Resources. Most terrains normally had Resource points, where a certain amount of Food and Minerals could be mined without any land development.

In-game, these locations are indicated by Resource Icons, and it's possible to collect Food and Resources from them without any buildings. These resources are then used as a foothold to advance a civilization's development.

That was how it was supposed to work...under normal circumstances.

But this territory had no identifiable Resources. No wonder it was called the Accursed Lands. It was only natural for the Dark Elves to be starving and for Takuto and Atou to be rolling around throwing a fit on the ground.

"Blehyyy," he groaned. "I just want to die and start over, but that'd be a waste, now that we've successfully recruited the Dark Elves. We've essentially struck RNG gold getting another race to join us during early game."

"I agree. Besides, we haven't learned everything from them yet—Oh? Speak of the devil, they are on their way here."

Since the Dark Elves became their citizens, Takuto and Atou now knew their every action. They'd ordered them to provide all the information they had on this world, and the last few days had consisted of learning about a variety of things, including the neighboring empires.

Elder Moltar had likely come to regale them with more stories

today.

It was just after sunrise. Takuto and Atou, who'd been lying on the grass sunbathing, exchanged looks as they confirmed Moltar's movements in their minds' mini-maps.

"Time to get up?"

"Yes, I suppose so, my king. Stay still so I can dust the dirt off you."

As Atou patted the dirt and grass off his hospital gown, Takuto thought about how much he still had to do, like getting new clothes.



"GREETINGS, King Ira! And Lady Atou. I hastened here today to explain more about this world to you!"

A much healthier-looking Elder Moltar came before the temporary throne with an energetic morning greeting. While he still had the body of a withered tree, having his troubles solved and regular access to food had entirely removed the shadow of death from his face.

"King! I came too! This time I brought one of my subordinates, Emle, with me!"

Moltar was accompanied by Warrior Captain Gia and his adjutant, Emle.

Notable for her glasses and slender body despite the improved food situation, Emle was the Dark Elf in charge of information. She was incredibly knowledgeable about other empires and various legends. Since information was what Takuto and Atou sought, she was the best person for the job.



Atou nodded, satisfied with the way they respectfully paid homage to their king. She stepped forward with a dignified air that belied her pitiful state rolling around on the ground earlier, and spoke for her communication-impaired king.

“The King is very pleased with your dedication. We have high expectations for you today, as always. Also, there’s no need to be so formal and stiff. His Majesty despises stuffy formalities and isn’t interested in wasting time on courteous exchanges. Besides that, you are our empire’s citizens.”

They were loyal, no question about it. But the respectful attitude that stemmed from that loyalty made Takuto uncomfortable.

He was just an ordinary guy when it came down to it. Sure, his family was well off, but as a commoner to the core, being revered by Moltar and the others was unsettling, to say the least.

“But how can we prove our allegiance then ...?”

Takuto had Atou tell them to drop the formalities to make it less awkward for him, but the proposal seemed to go against their common sense.

“Loyal behavior can be faked, but true allegiance dwells in the heart and mind. The King fully knows just how devoted you are to him. Hence, there is no issue with you acting casual.”

“Yep, yep. I know.”

“Oooh! Great King Ira! What merciful words! If the King says so, then we shall joyously refrain from standing on ceremony!”

Elder Moltar had wondered what the reasoning was but was convinced by his king’s words.

To the Dark Elves, the King of Ruin was always right, and if he said something was so, then the only thing in the wrong was the common sense ingrained in them since childhood.

And, as Atou said, their allegiance wouldn’t waver simply by changing the way they spoke. Instead, their king’s thoughtfulness gave them measureless joy.

No doubt their conversation today would become even more rewarding because of it. Convinced that was the case, Elder Moltar and the two with him contemplated where to start the day’s information session when their rumination was interrupted.

“Oh, right! We would like to explain our future plans to you before we get into our usual session. It’s the perfect opportunity as

both Elder Moltar and Warrior Captain Gia are present today.”

The Dark Elves nodded, both a little surprised at the sudden suggestion and convinced it was time to discuss such things.

Mynoghra was an empire, even if it only consisted of one settlement and a throne. It wasn't just a gathering of refugees. It was only natural to decide on the empire's agenda if they were going to conquer the world under their mighty leader.

Both Elder Moltar and Gia were leaders among the Dark Elves. There was much for them to do. Renewing their determination to devote all their power to his cause, they stood at attention and awaited the King's orders.

“You will continue to hold important positions in Mynoghra's national administration as members of the empire-management council. This is the King's decision. There is no room for debate,” Atou started.

“Elder Moltar will handle matters of national management. We have high hopes for you, since you seem capable of using magic too. Gia will continue in his role as Warrior Captain. Please lead the warriors of Mynoghra to victory. You can choose who will serve under you, and if there are no issues at hand, you are welcome to use your former subordinates.”

The Dark Elves graciously accepted their roles. The King's directives fell in line with what they had expected. Of course, just because they expected it didn't mean they took it lightly. They were going to repay the debt they owed, if only a little.

Warrior Captain Gia pounded his chest, determination burning in his eyes. “As you command. If it is for my king, I will immediately give the order, and we will gladly slaughter your enemies, down to the last infant!”

Gia's declaration echoed through the forest, reaching into the great beyond with gusto. In his mind, he imagined the King giving a pleased nod and Atou encouraging him to go through with it. He was positive his bright future as a brave warrior began today. He dreamed of slaying the King's many enemies as his vanguard on the battlefield.

“What the hell? That's scary...”

“It is?!”

The King had the completely opposite response from what Gia was hoping for with his passionate declaration.

The Warrior Captain froze like a statue, his eyes wide as

saucers. His brain came to a screeching halt. Had he said something offensive without realizing it? He ran through everything he'd said and did over the past few minutes and found nothing out of place.

“War is so barbaric.”

“The King prefers peace.”

Of course Gia's suggestion didn't get the reaction he expected—they had fundamentally different ways of thinking.

Takuto uttered his soft stance on war as if it was the most obvious course of action, and Atou supported the sentiment.

At that moment, Gia wanted to cry, “Why is the King of Ruin a pacifist?!”

But he convinced himself it was because the King had some profound, unfathomable logic he based that decision on. Gia decided to diffidently voice what he hoped the King was thinking.

“P-Pardon my confusion, but is your plan to bring ruin upon the world indirectly rather than directly?”

“Nope.”

“The King prefers domestic affairs. Remember that.”

“Y-Yes, ma'am. I will abide by His Majesty's wishes...”

Gia's assumptions were struck down yet again. The King had utterly denied them. Gia's confusion was spinning out of control.

He glanced to his left, where Elder Moltar was stroking his white beard with amusement. Gia, whose selling point was his calm and collected nature, almost blew a fuse when Moltar winked at him mockingly, but he sucked it up, as they were in the presence of the King.

In the end, what the King says goes.

Gia might've embarrassed himself and had his motivation squashed, but his core personality hadn't changed after becoming evil. He didn't have an insatiable desire to kill all living things. His people had been forced to live in suffering for a long time.

If the King wanted peace, then that was for the best. Everything should be as the King wanted it. That was how Gia was able to accept it.

“In the meantime, get plenty of rest and make those gaunt bodies of yours a little easier on the eyes. After that...comes building proper housing, I suppose.”

Atou started giving out instructions while Gia was busy coming to terms with his doubts in his own way. Orders to rest for the time being were a godsend.

Aside from everyone taking part in this meeting, the Dark Elves were on their last leg. They vowed to devote even more fealty to their king for granting them time to rest up without having to ask for it.

“Yes, ma’am! We are truly thankful for your boundless compassion. However, if I might be so bold, those of us here can still be of use to you while the others rest. I can be of service to you in a variety of ways—unlike Gia here, who is only useful for his strength!”

Moltar flashed Gia a provocative smirk only he could see.

Damn you, old man! You’re all game now that you’re fat with food! Gia mentally cursed him with all his heart but kept his mouth shut while swearing to clear his name when a better situation presented itself.

“You would all be better off resting too, but—King Takuto, they appear to be workaholics. Should we order them to gather resources or choose where to build our settlement?”

Their offer was an unexpected one. A little unsure on how to proceed but delighted nevertheless, Atou turned to her master for his opinion.

Although Takuto didn’t want to overwork them, he also didn’t want their motivation to go to waste, so he racked his brain for an easy job they could do while making the most of their Dark Elf abilities.

Every race has various traits. Assigning units to manage facilities or jobs that suit their unique race traits is a key game strategy to further advance your empire.

As Takuto remembered those game elements and started putting a strategy together, a brilliant idea suddenly hit him.

“I know!”

Atou immediately reacted to his utterance. She tilted her head, her eyes locked on him, and quietly waited as if wordlessly asking, “Did you come up with a plan?”

“What about assigning them to do Terrain Enhancements that don’t damage the forest?”

Atou clapped her hands at her king’s suggestion. He just had to say one thing for her to know exactly what he was getting at. She really was the perfect subordinate.

“Right! They are Dark Elves, after all.” Atou turned from Takuto to the Dark Elves. “Elder Moltar, I would like to confirm if

your people can procure lumber and build various structures without destroying the forest?"

Elves and forests go hand and hand. That was common knowledge not only in *Eternal Nations*, but most fantasy worlds in general. *And in this game*, Takuto thought, *the Elf races have the unique trait of building structures without causing deforestation.*

Forests produce various beneficial resources: Food, Lumber, and Anti-Pollution Effects. All of these resources are crucial to managing an empire.

However, the player usually has to clear the forests and secure land to start building anything. And, naturally, once you fell all the trees, the Forest Bonuses go away too. Elves were among the most favored races in the game because they can maintain the Forest while building within it.

Takuto had asked hoping that trait carried over to this world, and it appeared his hunch was right.

"We aren't as skilled at it as the Elves who belong to the Light, but...we are also a people who make their home in the woods. If I may state our preference, we do prefer building up in the large trees to living on the ground," Elder Moltar answered.

"Perfect!"

"Our king prefers to build without destroying the environment. This is a good sign."

Takuto's delight showed on his face. That was just how big of an advantage Forest Bonuses gave.

In particular, improved hygiene would contribute significantly to population growth and upkeep in the future. How could he not crack a smile over the benefits he was sure to obtain later on?

"I am brimming with pride to know the King is pleased with our natural talents," Elder Moltar said.

"Grrr..." Gia groaned aloud, unable to hide his disappointment when he thought the King of Ruin would start his reign of terror by destroying the forests.

But after a few moments of scowling, he determined he must've had the wrong idea about Ruin and tuned back into Atou's explanation of the King's desires.

Was it his youth that made him struggle to accept things outside what he'd come to know as common sense?

"Please do your best to collect lumber and other resources without exhausting the forest. You can do it at your own pace,"

Atou instructed.

"I'm looking forward to seeing the amazing transformation the forest will have with the Encroachment effect."

"As am I, my king."

The King was done speaking.

The Dark Elves were curious about several of the things he'd said to Atou but decided not to ask as those were not words meant for them.

They knew their place.

Henceforth, they were going to restore their clan to its former glory under their new king. They still had clansmen who'd split off to escape to distant lands. Proving their worth was the best way to get the King to welcome those detached brethren into his empire.

Elder Moltar and his people planned to offer everything they had to the King, sparing no effort or resource at their disposal.

"Good luck. Don't forget to Reforest."

King Ira offered those final words of encouragement to them.

Feeling like he'd ascended into the heavens just by receiving those spine-tingling words, Gia didn't miss this ultimate chance to speak directly to the King.

"Yes, sir! O great and mighty King, may I ask a question?"

"What's the matter?" Atou immediately injected herself between them.

Gia wanted to hear directly from the King, but was satisfied to know he had his ear. There were matters more important to tend to than that. He was ashamed to show his ignorance, but knew it was a greater crime to pretend he understood something when he didn't.

Thus, he gingerly repeated that word he'd never heard before.

"Forgive me, but what exactly does it mean to...Reforest?"

Surprise flickered across Atou's face. The uncomfortable change in the air filled the brave Warrior Captain with terror.

What in the world did it mean to Reforest? What kind of act was it?

Ignorance is shame, knowledge is light. However, anyone who hides their ignorance to keep up appearances is doomed to fail, Gia thought.

He came right out and asked to avoid that pitfall, but his question seemed to unsettle his rulers more than even he anticipated.

"What?"

The King sounded surprised. That single utterance plunged Gia into greater distress than he'd ever experienced before, but it seemed King Ira was genuinely more surprised than disappointed. His jet-black figure wavered as he crossed his arms and began contemplating what was said.

"You don't know about Reforesting?" Atou asked.

"...I'm afraid not. Forgive me."

"It's fine if you don't. How about you, Elder Moltar? And the girl in the back—Emle?"

Elder Moltar and Adjutant Emle shook their heads.

Gia was about to pray to his ancestors to save him from despair if they knew what he didn't, but seeing as neither of their clan's scholars had any idea, this was a fundamental difference in knowledge between them and their king.

"Hmm... I thought your technological level was around Smelting, Fishing, Farming, and Fortress Building? It's weird you don't know this."

Takuto was unusually talkative. Gia and the rest were surprised to hear him say so much to them when he usually left the talking to Atou.

"You *do* understand the terms King Takuto just mentioned, I hope?" Atou asked.

The Dark Elf trio nodded. Those were technological concepts even they were familiar with. They may not have lived in big cities, but they had their own trades before they had to flee. They also possessed basic knowledge about the names and general purposes of the different technologies belonging to each empire.

Gia considered explaining what they knew, but Atou beat him to it.

"Then do you know any of these: Four Major Elements, Military Magic, Six Major Elements, Special Magic Source, Strategic Offense Magic, Troops Allocation Magic, Floating Weapons, Terrain Manipulation, Dimension Summoning, Netherworld Dolls, or Genetic Enhancement Magic? All of these fall under Magic Technology."

Those terms were entirely beyond their understanding.

Atou said they counted as Magic Technology, but they hadn't heard of any of them, and some of the terms sounded utterly foreign. They could vaguely grasp what the words meant. But the very concepts seemed so illusory, they failed to believe they could

exist in reality.

Trembling before the fact Atou uttered all those concepts like they should be obvious knowledge, Elder Moltar responded about the one Magic Technology he knew existed in this world.

“W-We know about the Four Major Elements. It’s the basic concept of our magic. But I’ve never heard of the rest...”

“What are your perceptions of magic?” Atou asked. “Please tell me how it relates to basic combat and military affairs. Do you have any magic-based squadrons?”

“Oh, let me answer that,” Emle spoke up. “In basic combat, Mages support Warriors with offensive magic. And it is common for Mages with recovery magic to be assigned to rear support squadrons in military situations. However, no one has formed a squad of just Mages because of range, needing guards, and longevity in battle. Some have considered the possibility, though...”

“This world is *stuck* at that level...?” Atou muttered, then fell silent.

This world’s technological levels were ridiculously out of balance.

Science Technology and Magic Technology are typically researched simultaneously.

Given what they had learned from Elder Moltar about the development of fortress building and iron armaments, Takuto and Atou had expected their Magic Technology to be at around the same level, which would’ve consisted of a basic understanding of Military Magic and the Six Major Elements.

But once they peeled back the layers and looked deeper, they discovered the magic advancements in this world were at a noob’s level or worse.

With that in mind, it made sense why they would marvel at the concept of Reforesting.

In *Eternal Nations*, Reforesting is a Terrain Enhancement available after unlocking and researching Agriculture and the Six Major Elements in their respective research trees. Reforesting uses magic to regrow trees at a much faster rate than in the real world, making it a more specialized technique than Atou gave it credit for.

But even if their Magic Technology was underdeveloped, they should’ve at least known the basic concept of Reforesting and had the means to do it without magic. And yet, the Dark Elves said they hadn’t even heard of it before.

Atou noticed the strange disconnect between this world and *Eternal Nations* and looked at Takuto to inform him of her thoughts. His silent nod proved he'd reached the same conclusion.

"In other words, the Magic Technology of this world is significantly lower than what His Majesty expected?" Elder Moltar summarized.

"...Yes, exactly. This is far worse than anticipated. It also makes things very interesting. We don't *know* what caused Magic Technology to fall behind, but if we accelerate our development before everyone else, we will gain a huge advantage over the other empires."

Takuto nodded along, expressing his approval. He must've been excited as he nodded faster than usual.

Gia observed his reaction and saw that their meeting was proceeding well enough to repeat his question when there was a lull in the conversation.

"If I may, Lady Atou, what is the purpose of Reforesting...?"

"Oh, we got off track, didn't we? Reforesting means replanting trees in an area that has been deforested to preserve the vegetation. Not only does this secure our Lumber source, but it also has various other Benefits."

"Hmm. I see, I see. As far as my knowledge is concerned, it can take anywhere from several hundred to thousands of years for a sapling to grow to maturity—could this be where magic comes in?" Elder Moltar asked.

"Indeed. By using the Magic Elements you don't know about yet, we can accelerate growth."

Elder Moltar fully grasped the situation now.

Trees in this world took a long time to mature, but they also had a tendency to be enormous enough to build houses into. And the larger the forest, the more trees they needed to clear for farmland.

Elves protected forests to live alongside them—they had no concept of keeping the vegetation under control.

But if nature could be nurtured with magic, and if the King was thinking of reigning over his empire for hundreds of years, *that* was another story.

Forests are finite and will eventually be depleted, and trees are an essential resource for construction. Focusing on woodland cultivation from an early stage is an investment in the future. And if

magic can accelerate growth, it will become a mighty weapon for increasing national power by generating enormous resources.

Elder Moltar was in awe of his king and his ability to transcend the thinking of Humans and even the long-lived Elves. Yet he also grappled with a new question: how did His Majesty possess knowledge that greatly surpassed modern thinking, such as the various Magic Technologies Atou told them about?

“If I may be so bold to ask, where in the world did you gain the knowledge about these Magic Technologies and Reforesting...?”

“All of this knowledge that is the truth of the world was created by our great God, the King of Mynoghra, Takuto Ira!” Atou proudly answered Elder Moltar’s query with the confidence people usually have when talking about themselves.

“Our king *created* it?!”

What?!

Takuto reacted two whole seconds later. Now that was the biggest load of bull he’d ever heard.

“Your people have experienced the King’s mercy and have received the honor of becoming his citizens. During that process, I believe you have all realized just how great and mighty he is.”

The Dark Elves gave big nods in response.

Takuto waved his hands to stop things from growing out of control, but everyone was so locked on Atou, his efforts ended in vain.

“You still don’t know! Our king is actually a hundred times more amazing than you think!” Atou doubled down on her lies in her loudest voice yet.

Obviously, Takuto should’ve butted in and denied it right there and then, but he had the unfortunate inability to speak up when he needed to. And so he was stuck anxiously watching Atou go on a boasting rampage of pure exaggeration.

It went without saying that Atou had nothing but good intentions. She might have actually even believed that Takuto really did create those technologies.

In fact, spreading that he created such knowledge would only serve to benefit them. At any rate, there was no denying she had just planted an outrageous time bomb without batting an eye.

Atou gestured to herself with her index finger, instructing them to ask her about anything.

Don’t make this an even bigger deal! Takuto thought, but of

course, this was one of those times they seemed to be out-of-sync.

Meanwhile, Emle keenly jumped on the opportunity to ask questions with stars in her eyes.

“Some time ago, in the Human Holy Kingdom of Qualia, there was a plague that killed many people. The priests of that country said that it was a demon’s curse. Does His Majesty know what the true cause was?”

“They probably exterminated too many of the cats living in their cities, causing a massive rat epidemic...” Atou explained. “Rats are reservoir hosts for many different plague bacteria. How it works is: someone catches the plague and dies, rats eat the infected carcass and proliferate, spreading the plague and killing more people that are then eaten by more rats. It creates quite a wonderfully endless loop. Our king discovered the issue.”

Apparently, this was another of the King of Mynoghra’s brilliant discoveries.

Obviously, Takuto had discovered no such thing. Some genius scientists had. Takuto quietly muttered apologies to those scientists who uncovered those life-changing truths after years of research.

“...They are plague hosts? So the presence of rats leads to people dying?” Emle asked.

“It’s not the rats themselves, but the fleas and bacteria they carry that are the cause. Creatures so small that they can’t be seen with the naked eye exist in this world. This is yet another brilliant discovery by our king.”

Th-There she goes again...

Takuto was getting a headache from the rapidly growing pile of achievements being attributed to him. But he didn’t burst into the conversation to warn Atou to stop. Or rather, he didn’t possess the communication skills or tact to correct her. Either way, the fact remained that he was too soft on Atou to say anything.

“Fascinating,” Elder Moltar said. “I can picture that if I imagine it as a very tiny gnat. We must come up with a way to exterminate this winged pest, before it can wreak havoc in our bodies.”

“There are several ways to deal with the problem. I assume you’re already considering bloodletting, but let me tell you in advance that draining blood from the sick does not purge the germs. It has the opposite effect of weakening the body. Praying is effective in a world with magic such as this, but its blessing doesn’t

work on thousands of people—so said our king.”

I said no such thing.

But now it was established that he had.

After that, Atou went into the most effective means to treat and prevent epidemics, making sure not to withhold any technological advancements related to medicine. All the while, Takuto’s esteem in the eyes of his people grew exponentially without him lifting a finger.

The Dark Elves directed their awe and respect toward him as their heads were filled with unfathomable knowledge and concepts.

Every aspect of this conversation dealt a nauseating blow to Takuto’s stomach.

“Our king can accomplish this much in just his sleep,” Atou boasted with a confident cackle.

Takuto simply nodded along in silence, hoping she would stop sooner rather than later since he knew he couldn’t do anything else.

“All the knowledge I have shared with you was created by our king. In the Land of the Gods, where he used to reside, there is much knowledge unknown to your kind. Advanced technologies can’t be used much at your current level, but our king will bestow blessings on you like he just did with this knowledge. Do you now understand just how blessed you are?”

As a matter of fact, most of what Atou said wasn’t wrong, barring the exaggerations about how great their king was.

It is generally believed that technology only becomes effective and viable once a civilization has reached appropriate cultural maturity and has gone through the prerequisite steps and research for the underlying technologies first.

That thought is both true and false. An explorer is overwhelmingly more likely to reach a treasure with a treasure map than aimlessly wandering through the fog with no directions.

Atou and Takuto certainly lacked the expertise and experience an expert would have. But possessing knowledge no one else had gave them a golden advantage.

“Then that means the *apuhls* His Majesty gave us is also a type of food he created in the Land of Gods, right?!”

The conversation shifted suddenly, as Emle brought up the fruit Takuto had produced with his Mana. Everything Emergency Production produced was from modern-day Earth and food he often ate during his life there.

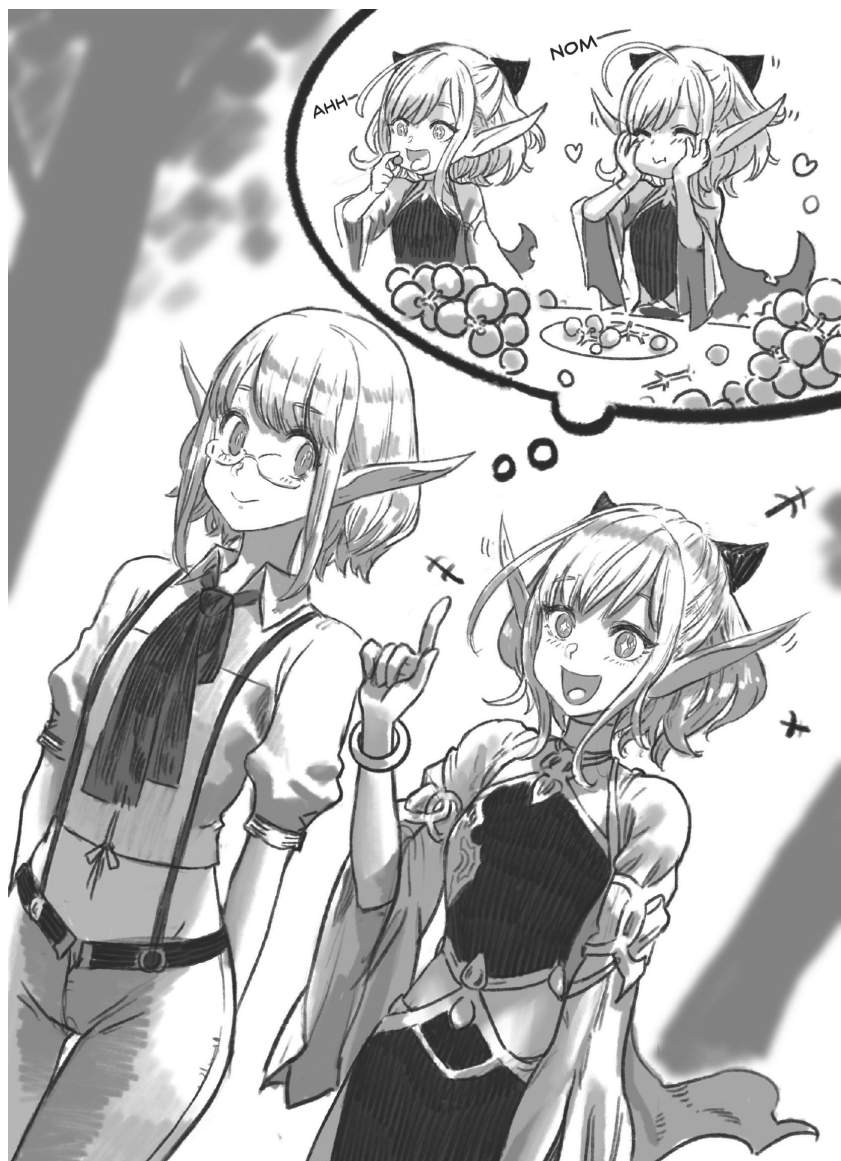
He had no idea what system allowed that miracle to happen. But it was a fact that technological progress could produce one of the greatest treasures known to man—an abundant food supply.

“Yes, yes, that’s absolutely correct. Isn’t it delicious? He’s created even more delicacies than that! I love grapes!”

Facts aside, Atou was getting out of control.

She’s banned from eating grapes for a while.

Atou was too excited to guess what Takuto was thinking as she spoke enthusiastically about various things she shouldn’t have.



Emle's spirits soared when she saw what a good mood Atou was in. She was delighted someone in a much higher, isolated position than herself had spoken to her as an equal. She responded to Atou's giddiness with a smile and the attitude of a younger coworker talking to an older female colleague she had struck up a friendship with.

"That's the cluster of purple balls, right? Which reminds me: I planted the seeds I found in them. And guess what? They've already started to bud! I can't wait to see them grow! Now we can harvest lots of fruit without troubling His Majesty!"

"Foolish child! How could you do that without asking His Majesty or me for permission first?!"

"Elder Moltar's right, Emle," Gia sternly scolded. "That wasn't wise. Why would you do such a thing?"

It was the insensitive men in attendance who rudely butted into the girls' budding friendship.

Takuto didn't want to interrupt the girls, but something Emle said had caught his attention enough to warrant following up.

"M-My curiosity got the best of me, and I thought it'd be okay because they taste so good..."

"You planted modern-age fruit from the Land of the Gods?"

Atou caught on to the same key point a few moments after Takuto. Her stunned gaze burrowed into Emle, causing the Dark Elf's shoulders to jump. She looked so pitiful, shrinking away like a scolded child, even Elder Moltar and Gia decided to take her side and mediate for a lesser punishment.

However, Atou and Takuto's thoughts were racing in a completely different direction. They didn't care that she acted without permission.

Every food produced by Emergency Production was from modern times and not of this world—yes, they were all from Takuto's world and time. In other words, finished products brought about by the advanced technology of the modern age could be used in this underdeveloped world.

Simply put, he had access to solutions from the future.

How much a nation can expand its population is directly linked to how much food it can produce.

Just thinking about the value of introducing high-yielding modern crops brought about by combining the best of

biotechnology and genetic engineering to his empire made Takuto's head spin.

That wasn't all either.

This revelation inspired an even greater one: producing modern food meant he could also produce modern resources.

Wasn't it impossible to use Emergency Production to produce Strategic Resources in this world? Not exactly—he just realized the only thing he couldn't produce were the Strategic Resources that existed *in* the game.

He had already tested and proved it was possible to produce goods from the modern world he once lived in. Now he needed to see what else it would work on.

For his first test, he held his palm out and thought of the item he wanted. Onto his palm fell a metal that was lighter than it appeared—aluminum.

Takuto cracked a smile.

He had access to base metals such as aluminum and steel, precious metals from naturally occurring chemical elements, fertilizer nutrients such as phosphate rock and potassium, and not only was gunpowder an option, but even smokeless gunpowder!

If he could produce the most important Strategic Resources that changed the shape of warfare, then it would be possible for him to form a powerful army before anyone else. And together with a mastery of Magic Technology, the various resources that were the origin of modern technology would create further possibilities.

Of course, he would need the necessary population, industrial power, and basic technology required for mass production of such things to get to that point. But even with that roadblock, Takuto was riveted by this system that removed the worry of finding Resources as long as he was willing to devote large amounts of Mana to it.

Oil was one such resource the people of his world were willing to kill over. More than anything else, securing resources regardless of having a source nearby would make Mynoghra a strong empire.

With that in mind, what Takuto needed most was Mana. And lots of it. An incomprehensible amount...

Using an astronomical amount of Mana to forcefully produce Rare and Important Resources—an impossible plan if Takuto wasn't the king, but there is no empire without a king and no king without an empire. No problem there then.

Takuto began formulating his strategies as he organized the rush of information spinning in his mind. The corners of his lips lifted, and a quiet laugh slipped out.

This was one of the few times a scheming, evil smile showed on his face. A wicked smile curled Atou's lips as she understood the conclusion he had drawn.

"I-I'm sorry...d-did I make a mistake?"

"No, we've entirely overlooked that. You actually did a marvelous job." Atou smiled gently at the frightened adjutant, showing she was pleased with a nod.

We have even more of a cheat-like advantage in this world than I thought.

Filled with this surreal realization, Takuto began revising his empire-management policies.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

Mynoghra has been granted the following Distinct Feature:

《Divine Privilege》

OK

Eterpedia



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Distinct Feature

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※ It ☐ ms prod ☐ ced by unacquired
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sed on th ☐ t technology's difficulty level.

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☐ ☐ ☐ the world.

NO IMAGE

SYSTEM MESSAGE

<!>Error Number 447 (Abnormal Operation was Performed)

<!> Nonexistent Distinct Feature Selected

<!> Inconsistencies Between the World Profile and Technology
Profile have Occurred.

<!> Game Balancing on the Original Map is now at Level FATAL.

OK

Chapter 8: Domestic Affairs

IDORAGYA is the collective name of the large continent connecting two vast, circular landmasses divided into smaller continents to the north and south.

On the southern landmass called the Dark Continent, many regions are unsuitable for building settlements, such as the Accursed Lands, and the whole area is known to be infested with highly aggressive Barbarians. It's made up of developing nations far behind the more advanced nations to the north, and to the far south is the mysterious Uncharted Territory, creating chaos and confusion worthy of the name the Dark Continent.

On the other hand, merely two big empires control the northern landmass called the Lawful Continent: the Holy Kingdom of Qualia, an empire of light ruled by Humans, and the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals ruled by Elves.

Various factors are intertwined in the prosperity of an empire. It's impossible to explain in just a few words how these two empires prospered and reached a relatively peaceful, though slightly strained, coexistence as followers of the same order. But the one known major contributing factor to that is—

—the ultimate weapon called a *Saint*.



THE Holy Kingdom of Qualia has adopted a provincial system to efficiently manage its vast territory. It's a unique empire with provinces possessing administrative authority located in the four cardinal directions around the Holy Capital of Qualiane.

The Northern Province is the least developed as it contains much of the frigid northern territory. At the northernmost tip of that province, in a land with so little value that only a few desolate fishing and farming villages exist, a girl wearing a white outfit unsuited to the climate gazed out at the snowy land.

“It's time, Saint Soalina. The messenger reported that the band

of Barbarians is advancing this way as we anticipated. Show them the miracle of God's will."

"...It shall be done."

Paladins dressed in extravagant armor with pure-white capes guarded one of the Northern Province's Cardinals who'd imparted that message to the Saint, his eyes trained on the distant expanse of snow-covered land.

Urged by the Cardinal with his shrewd and cutting gaze, the girl stepped forward. Seconds later, unsettling shrieks rose in the distance, followed by plumes of snow kicked up into the air as a horde of Demi-humans charged toward them, trampling the ground as they went.

They were about half the size of Humans, with rough blue skin, shark-like eyes, razor-sharp fangs, and faces devoid of intelligence. They wielded clubs, sharpened sticks, and crude axes cobbled together with sticks and stones.

This was the horde of Snow Goblins, several thousand strong, that had suddenly appeared in the Northern Province.

For Qualia, which had an army of over 10,000 units in each province, a horde of Goblins inferior to Humans in every way was no different than a swarm of gnats. But that only applied to the empire as a whole—the horde was still a threat to defenseless citizens.

As it was, several villages had already been destroyed, and their residents' lives lost since the horde appeared.

The Snow Goblin horde was now hunting its next prey. And there was but one person who stood in their way—a girl of seventeen wearing robes of white and gold, known for her ephemeral expressions and flower accessories.

The common folk had various names for her: God's Compassion, the Flower Maiden, the Beautiful One, Guardian of the World. Her true title was Saint Soalina of Blooming Burials, one of Idoragya's Seven Great Savior Saints.

She was the embodiment of godly Miracles that the Holy Kingdom of Qualia venerated.

"To bring calamity upon this land and strike terror into man's heart is a sin that cannot be forgiven. God's sorrow has peaked. The time for you to repent is long gone," Soalina spoke with flowing eloquence.

Would her words even reach the Snow Goblins whose intelligence was up for debate? Soalina poured out her heart regardless, as if reciting a poem or aria to comfort the souls of the lost.

“The anguished cries of the innocent, the voice of our peace-seeking God, I hear ye!”

Soalina raised her hand and thrust her palm in front of her.

The Snow Goblins moved nimbly through the terrain. The threat they posed was imminent—a few seconds more and the flowerlike girl would be trampled underfoot. The Cardinal started to panic behind her, and the Paladins drew their swords.

But Saint Soalina spoke with quiet calm, “For the sin of corrupting the order of the Holy Kingdom of Qualia and for the wickedness of defying our Holy God Arlos—I entomb ye now in a blooming burial.”

Hellfire purged the land.

There was no lead up to it—a swirl of all-consuming flames simply appeared before Soalina.

The horde of Snow Goblins was reduced to ashes along with the dirt and vegetation, filling the area with disturbing shrieks and the nauseating smell of burnt flesh. The cries of the dying could be heard until they were caught up in the swirl of blooming flames and petered off.

The once frigid land now looked more akin to a region afflicted by everlasting summer, which was tolerable for the resilient Paladins, but the Cardinal and his attendants were so hot, they had to remove their capes and roll up their sleeves.

The horde of thousands of Snow Goblins that’d left a path of destroyed villages in their wake had been reduced to a pile of crumbling cinders once the Saint joined the battle.

The flames went out. Silence fell over the area as no one spoke a word about the miracle they had just witnessed.

Change occurred soon after.

A single flower quietly bloomed. Then flowers started popping up in a steady stream that accelerated into a wave of growing plants.

It wasn’t long before the whole area was covered in flowers, blanketing any trace of the fire. It was like watching flowers being laid down for the deceased at a funeral.

A single unit capable of easily decimating a whole army—*this*

was why the Saints were said to be the ultimate weapon.

“...Cardinal,” Saint Soalina spoke to the man behind her without taking her eyes off the flower petals being scattered by the snowstorm blowing through the newly-created field.

“What can I do for you, Saint Soalina?”

“What of the conversation we had the other day?”

“The other day? What conversation might that be?”

“Dispatching Paladins to investigate the omen of apocalypse coming from the Accursed Lands located on the Dark Continent.”

“The Dark Continent is outside our kingdom’s jurisdiction. Dispatching troops to that area requires petitioning each country and the lords reigning over the territories our men will pass through. We also have to consider war expenditures and rewards. You, more than anyone, should know we can’t mobilize the Order of Paladins on a whim. Is the omen valid?”

Her inquiry was met with a longwinded and snide rebuttal. It was plain as day he didn’t want to go through the trouble.

The Cardinal was taking advantage of the fact none of the Paladins on standby were watching to shake his head. Only he knew what he meant by that gesture, but it was easy to tell this wasn’t the first time he had discussed such things with the Saint.

“Yes, there is definitely an omen of apocalypse... You needn’t mobilize the Paladins. I can go by myself—”

“You fail to comprehend your own position, my saint!”

The Cardinal’s angry voice caused the apprentice clergyman at his side to tremble.

Saint Soalina turned around and quietly looked at the Cardinal. Her eyes were devoid of emotion. Frustrated even further by those doll-like eyes, the Cardinal let out a loud sigh and gave her a scornful look.

“For heaven’s sake, where do you think that foolish idea will get you? Please develop a better understanding of your importance. You are no longer some peasant farmer girl, you understand?”

Saint Soalina kept her silence before his blatant insults. Rather than gritting her teeth in silent frustration at not having a good comeback, it seemed more like she lacked the emotions to be moved one way or another by slander of that level. Her reaction seemed to come from both a philosophical outlook and resignation.

“*Tch!* There are several people I can personally mobilize. I will give them the order.”

Nevertheless, Saints held an untouchable position. A mere Cardinal had no reason or right to object to her decisions. He finally gave up trying to talk her out of it and offered an alternative.

Soalina's lips formed their first youthful smile as she nodded. With that, one of her concerns was laid to rest. She pretended, like always, not to hear the Cardinal muttering "Stupid peasant girl" under his breath as he left. He seemed to forget she had supernatural hearing.

...The Saints were isolated and lonely. Granted extraordinary physical strength and the power to do miracles from the Holy God Arlos, they were required to have absolute dedication and loyalty as followers of law and order—even when they were exposed to the vile jealousy of those who envied their position.

She did nothing but use her miracles today and every day to save everyone, to protect every smile, and for those she could not save.

"Thank you. May Arlos's blessing be upon them..."

The Cardinal quickly prepared to withdraw the troops without waiting for her words. As she emotionlessly watched his back walk away, Saint Soalina of Blooming Burials whispered into the wind, "I have to save them..."

Her words melted away into the frigid landscape.

The army of law and order was undeniably sensing the signs of change coming to the world.



"IT'S time for some good ol' building fun!!!"

Atou's enthusiastic voice echoed through the Accursed Land's forest.

Mynoghra now had citizens and personnel assigned to important empire-management roles, even if in name only at this point. With the basic foundation of an empire in place, it was finally time to get to the part Takuto and Atou enjoyed the most: Domestic Affairs.

"Mighty King Takuto's empire is still in its infancy. It must now be fortified and expanded to become influential enough to rule all the land and powerful enough to reach the heavens. We are counting on all of you to help with the first step toward that goal."

The stone dais that had become Takuto's home base since

arriving in this world had drastically changed in appearance.

It was now reinforced with the throne the Dark Elves had put heart and soul into making for him, a quilt knitted from grass draped over it and onto the floor, and a simple building with a roof had been built around it. While the building was a simple design consisting of linking several nearby trees with wood planks, it still made Takuto's mood soar.

The cherry on top was his new clothes. Takuto had set aside his drab hospital gown to wear the unique outfit the Dark Elves had made for him. The fact things were proceeding smoothly, along with the tastefully designed clothes he now wore, satisfied him.

Presently, a meeting was being held at the simple wood table set before the throne. Only Atou and Elder Moltar were sitting in on this meeting, but someday this table would be full of his trusty council members.

Takuto trembled with joy as he dreamed of such a future.

Everything was proceeding according to plan.

Takuto softly closed his eyes and redirected his attention toward the information he had on the internal state of his empire.

Mynoghra's overall Mana supply was steadily increasing.

Mana can be produced by specialized facilities or the terrain, but the most common source comes from the set amount collected from an empire's citizens every month as a type of tax. The percentage collected is based on citizen happiness.

Inhumane means of forcefully collecting hefty taxes regardless of citizen wellbeing or draining the people of their Mana are two strategies a player can use. But in the end, running an empire full of happy citizens is the best way to get the most Mana.

I will guide everyone to ultimate happiness with my own hands!

Put another way, citizen happiness was essential for Mynoghra's growth.

Brimming with the kind of determination unsuited to the ruler of an evil civilization, Takuto contentedly stroked his throne and enjoyed the fruits of his people's labor.

The meeting chugged on with him being little more than a figurine stroking the throne in the background, since talking wasn't his thing.

"With that settled, what types of structures should we build first, Lady Atou?"

"Hmm, good question."

Atou rubbed her chin in thought.

Takuto had discussed his plans with her beforehand, so he could leave the explanation in her capable hands. She only took that thoughtful pause to go through the economic policies they had already covered. She quickly nodded to herself and relayed what Takuto wanted done.

“First, we will build facilities for producing Food. You can’t fight on an empty stomach, after all. Not that we will be fighting even on a full stomach.”

“Food is indeed very important. But can’t His Majesty just produce an infinite supply of it?”

“Of course he can, but why must our king waste his precious time on such a trivial thing? And besides, it will become a logistics problem as our territory expands.”

“You are absolutely right. Please forgive my lack of insight.”

“No need for that. Anyway, for the time being, let’s create a facility that produces Food Icons.” Atou waved off his apology and pulled something from her pocket.

Though Elder Moltar sometimes struggled to understand Atou’s peculiar wording, he thoroughly grasped her intentions and accepted the strange object—some kind of sapling—from her.

“Please plant and grow this tree. After that, we need to build a Management Post, a Storehouse, and a Silo, and then we’re all set. I will give you more details later.”

“What kind of tree is it?”

It was a little bigger than the palm of his hand and had roots and strangely constricted branches. Unfortunately, Elder Moltar had no knowledge pertaining to this sapling, so he didn’t know how it would mature or what fruit it would bear.

What he did know was that he’d received direct orders to plant it, unlike the time Emle planted the grape seeds without permission. Clearly, this was unlike any other plant. In more ways than one—

“It’s a Flesh Tree.”

“Pardon?”

“A Flesh Tree!”

Indeed, this was far different from any other plant.

Atou had repeated its name as if boasting about how amazing it was. She was proud of it.

Meanwhile, Elder Moltar had no idea how to react. All he knew was this plant wasn’t of his world. Actually, he hoped such a

disturbing plant would never exist in this world.

“Forgive me, Lady Atou...but could you, well, please explain in more detail...”

“It’s one of the Food production facilities unique to our civilization. I called it a Flesh Tree, but to be precise, it’s a tree that produces mysterious meat-fruit that tastes like Human flesh.”

“Sounds evil, doesn’t it?” Takuto chimed in, now bored just petting his throne.

It was a fairly bland reaction, all things considered. Clearly, this tree came as no surprise to the two of them.

Elder Moltar groaned.

Food was essential and meat could support and strengthen more people than grain and vegetables alone. But just because their alignment had changed to evil didn’t mean their food preferences had as well.

In fact, Elder Moltar still preferred fish to eating livestock. He inevitably worried about how high of a hurdle this food source would prove to be. His people wouldn’t be able to swallow Human flesh that easily...

“I will follow your orders. However, I believe it will take time for people to adapt to eating Human flesh. How do I put it...there are some among us who have unpleasant memories.”

“Well, this facility won’t be providing all the meals, so people will have a choice,” Atou reassured.

“Everyone has foods they like and dislike,” Takuto added.

Elder Moltar sighed with relief.

Cringe-worthy food sources aside, the Food problem seemed to be solved. Dark Elves understood the suffering of starvation best.

Elder Moltar was grateful to the King for eliminating the need to make his clansmen choose who starved and who ate. But it was ironic that the solution to their suffering was eating fruit that tasted like Human flesh.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

The facility to be constructed has been selected.

Under Construction: 《Flesh Tree》

OK



Flesh Tree

Building

Food + 1
Food Production + 10%
Mabeast Unit Regeneration + 10%
Units with <Taste for Human Flesh> Regeneration + 50%

NO IMAGE

Description

The Flesh Tree is a building unique to Mynoghra that takes the place of a Granary. In addition to its Food benefits, it also increases the Regeneration rate of Mabeast Units. It also greatly increases the Regeneration rate of units with the trait: <Taste for Human Flesh>.

CONSTRUCTING Flesh Trees also provided good prospects for the future of the empire's Food Production. And since they were also cultivating new farmland, food shouldn't become an issue unless their population rapidly increased.

There were some big discrepancies between how things worked in this world and *Eternal Nations*, but the key strategies to make an empire prosper were roughly the same.

These key strategic points were: Expansion, Economic Development, Military Planning, and Research. Of these, Takuto had placed Expansion on hold in favor of advancing Economic Development by increasing their Food Production with Flesh Trees.

This left Military Planning and Research.

Takuto and the usual members of the empire-management council had gathered again to decide Mynoghra's economic policies.

"Today's meeting agenda is to talk about Research, yes?" Elder Moltar started. "We don't have much manpower to devote at the moment, but I believe it is of great importance regardless..."

"Indeed it is. Research creates new technologies. And new technologies always give big leaps in power to a nation. It is urgent for us, as a small country, to obtain advanced technology."

"I completely agree with you. And so, Lady Atou, what technology should we begin researching?"

"Magic Technology, of course!" Atou declared with delight as if this was what she had been waiting for all along.

"I'm hyped!"

"Hehehe! It's something to get hyped about, isn't it, my king?"

Takuto and Atou were unusually obsessed with Domestic Affairs. It was this crazy obsession of theirs that had them constantly working on Mynoghra's domestic development right after being suddenly transferred to another world.

It was still unclear what fed that madness, but whatever it was, to Elder Moltar and the Dark Elves, this was better than being ordered to conquer the world or slaughter everything that breathed.

"Ooh! I have a slightly deeper understanding of magic myself, so I also feel the *hype* about new Magic Technology. Now then, what kind of technology are we going to research?"

Elder Moltar had stopped feeling as nervous around the King lately. His awe and respect remained unchanged, but the bone-chilling fear he experienced during their first encounter had gone

since he'd become the King's vassal and an evil being himself.

So now he used less formal language during meetings with the King. It may have also had something to do with the fact that most of the talking was done by Atou and not Takuto. Of the two, Atou was easier to talk to.

This only expedited Takuto's isolation and lack of communication skills. The meeting went on nevertheless. The topics were all approved by Takuto, of course.

They had moved on to talking about Magic Technology research and the technology they wanted to be prioritized.

"Military Technology. The magic you use now targets only individuals or groups made up of no more than a few dozen units at a time. Military Technology expands your range and allows you to exert your magic over whole invading armies or large terrains. It requires a Mana Source to use, but...I can get into the finer details about that with you later."

Elder Moltar listened to Atou's detailed explanation with rapt attention. He'd spent much of his life working toward uncovering the most magic could offer. Though he'd had to neglect his studies since becoming the busy clan chief, he still had a strong desire to peep into the abyss of magical knowledge.

He also took pride in his combat magic, but only in one-on-one battles. He could easily incinerate a few dozen rogues with fire magic like Atou said, but without some miracle, his range couldn't be expanded to cover an army.

What else did this realm of magic only the King knew of have to offer? Elder Moltar trembled in anticipation of obtaining unheard of wisdom.

"Please select several people who excel at magic for this research. We'll have them develop the new technology. Don't worry, it's not that difficult of a technology—you'll have it ready in no time."

"Yes, ma'am! In that case, I will immediately set about selecting the people for the job and constructing the research center."

"Yes, do that," Atou said to Elder Moltar, then muttered, "Things are going to get busy..."

Hearing what she said, Takuto hummed "Mm-hm" as he returned to stroking his throne.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

The Technology to be researched has been selected.

Researching: 《 **Military Magic** 》

OK



AND that was how they decided on their current research policy. This was the safest route given their current state as a small empire. Researching more advanced technologies would be less effective and require a large dedicated team. Keeping that in mind, Elder Moltar carefully selected the people for the job and explained his reasoning in detail.

“All that’s left now are our military policies, yes? What do you have in mind, Lady Atou?” Elder Moltar asked.

“Well, increasing our numbers is the overall goal, but we can’t devote too much to it yet. Having a military costs you Resources, Mana, and Upkeep fees without producing anything. What’s the point of even having one?”

“That said, we can’t protect ourselves from outside invaders without one. We currently have about a dozen or so Warriors. To be honest, that is an inefficient force to protect the King... Forgive my insolence for asking, but is it possible for His Majesty to create strong subordinates with his powers?”

Elder Moltar made a sound argument. Although a military ate a lot of resources without doing much in return, not having one wasn’t an option.

Atou took Elder Moltar’s proposal to heart and considered various measures for when the need arose. But she couldn’t come up with a good plan to expand their military forces off the top of her head.

“Hmm. You’re talking about making a military that wouldn’t require conscripting citizens, right? There is a way, but it would still consume lots of Mana and Resources. And I’m most concerned about how building a military might draw unwanted attention from the outside. Frankly, we can’t afford that right now.”

“Increasing our national power must come first then? I will inform the Warriors that we will be training even harder,” Warrior Captain Gia replied with a grim expression.

Atou was perplexed by his reaction since there was no immediate need to focus on a military or actively strengthen their forces. But then it clicked for her and she addressed Gia’s concerns with confidence.

"Oh, right, your people are worried about being hunted down. Am I right to understand that bounty hunters might come for you?"

"Yes, ma'am. I highly doubt the Alliance will send their troops after us, but there is a bounty out for Elder Moltar and I as we are well-known. And Dark Elves can also be sold for good money, because we have no rights."

"*Hmm, I see...*"

Atou contemplated the problem and looked to Takuto to make the decision.

He anticipated an enemy might show up in pursuit of the Dark Elves and he'd accepted them as citizens, knowing their problem would become Mynoghra's. So he wasn't going to hold it against them now.

The problem was how to deal with it. Takuto had no complaints about their current strength, but deciding on a policy to enhance their forces with the future in mind would help reassure his citizens.

"Let's make a Hero."

Atou readily accepted her king's suggestion. It was the method with the lowest cost and least risk.

"Lady Atou, what is a Hero?" Gia asked.

"Mynoghra has Heroes who serve directly under the King," Atou began, explaining what the Dark Elves didn't understand in Takuto's stead. "They are all ridiculously powerful monsters with more than a few screws loose—they're all loose! There are restrictions in place that prevent us from summoning them all right now, but one is possible."

"I don't mean to question our great king's direct subordinates, but are Heroes really all that powerful?" Elder Moltar asked.

Heroes are unique units that exist in *Eternal Nations*.

Atou was classified as a Hero unit, and it went without saying that she was Takuto's favorite.

They are such powerful units that the outcome of a game session can be determined by their use. But the Dark Elves naturally had no way of knowing this, leaving them doubtful and perplexed.

"Heroes are overpowered."

"Yes, Heroes are terribly overpowered."

"O-Overpowered how?"

"Heroes are powerful from the start. And if that isn't special enough, they also have a disposition for becoming more powerful as

time passes. The longer you leave them be, the stronger they become.”

“They become stronger just standing around...?” Elder Moltar was stunned by the possibility.

In war, those who are smiled upon by the Goddess of War and Luck tend to be lucky enough to survive while leaving their mark on the battlefield. Such people were called heroes in recognition of their achievements.

But to be born with the qualities of a hero? And to become stronger and more experienced without having to lift a finger? Now that was a being worthy of being called a hero.

And if such a soldier were to command the troops, their military strength would rise to immeasurable levels.

Just by leaving them alone, they became stronger.

The Dark Elves present for that explanation couldn’t conceal their excitement over having a hero in their midst with reality-bending powers.

“Put simply, creating Heroes is the key to our national defense problems while we need to lay low and don’t have the national power to maintain a large army.”

Forming an army usually requires enormous amounts of resources, time, and personnel. But military problems could be easily solved by having just one of the Hero units that made *Eternal Nations* a great game.

Their powerful abilities were more than enough to defend the empire, and unlike the game, they only required the costs spent on a single unit. They had unwavering loyalty and didn’t draw unnecessary attention either. Being inconspicuous would buy their empire more time to grow.

Time worked in their favor. The more time they had, the more powerful their Hero units would become. In other words, even a smaller nation with limited national power could have strength on par with the larger nations if they had the right Hero.

Takuto felt the differences between this world and the game on various fronts, but in this respect, it could be said that the system of *Eternal Nations* was working to their advantage.

“Ooh! What a reliable ally to have! If such a strong person joins our military, it will raise warrior morale to its zenith, bringing out ten times as much strength and enthusiasm in the troops! Don’t you agree, Gia?”

“Yeah! I completely agree, Elder Moltar. The strength of the vanguard is the strength of the army! There are countless examples of brave and strong commanders who have overturned the odds to win against larger armies. I wouldn’t expect any less of our empire and King than to be able to summon such a person!”

If they had a hero, they would be able to hold their own, and other countries would have to acknowledge them. At the very least, the empires located in Idoragya’s southern continent wouldn’t be able to carelessly pick a fight with them.

The presence of a powerful soldier during a skirmish greatly impacts morale for both sides.

A good example of this is when the strongest soldier from each side fights in a one-on-one battle. Their bravery during battle and loud war cries cutting across the field can inflict severe mental damage on enemy forces.

A single hero is often said to be a match for a thousand men. Just the presence of a hero quadruples an army’s capabilities.

That was how Elder Moltar and Captain Gia interpreted Atou’s use of the word “Hero”—wrongly.

“Oh, yes, I forget to mention it, but I’m one of those Heroes,” Atou nonchalantly dropped that bomb. “And since you seem to have the wrong idea about us, let me show you what we *really* are —”

While the news shocked everyone, they’d no trouble accepting that their great King’s closest aide was a Hero.

Then, for some reason, Atou stood from the table and briskly walked toward the forest outside the imperial court. The building with no walls where the throne and council table were set up counted as their simple imperial court. Since the court wasn’t that big, everyone could clearly see Atou outside of it.

When she finally came to a stop, eerie tentacles erupted from her back. They were elongated and resembled wireworms, with the uncanny way they squirmed and clicked. The moment that this sight reminded the Dark Elves the girl they called Atou was an extension of the Darkness—

—the trees in front of them were instantly mowed down.

“We are called Heroes because one of us can destroy a whole army.”

“Wooooaaah!!!”

Trees snapped and fell on top of each other. A single swing from one of her tentacles had cut down dozens of mature trees at their trunks.



Elder Moltar unknowingly groaned before her tremendous attack power while Gia gaped, instantly understanding the strength behind that single strike.

They'd had the completely wrong idea—they'd categorized heroes as individuals. They thought heroes were individuals with unrivaled military prowess.

But these "Heroes" were beyond that—monsters with strength rivaling whole armies.

A one-man elite force.

The ultimate weapon capable of overturning any outcome.

That was Mynoghra's Hero.

"If we continue to build up our strength like this, we can contend with the empires surrounding the Accursed Lands no problem," Atou said, walking back to the court as her swaying tentacles retracted. The Dark Elves couldn't fathom how that worked. "The two largest empires are far off to the north. They currently have no reason to send a large army our way."

Those who'd just learned of her ability welcomed her back flabbergasted.

"This isn't even a hundredth of my full power, but...do you understand the strength of a Hero now?"

"S-Such unfathomable strength!" Elder Moltar said in awe.

"I-I can't believe you're this powerful!" Gia exclaimed. "You made me realize all over again just how great and mighty you and King Takuto Ira are!"

"*Hehehe!* I will annihilate all of King Takuto's enemies, so don't worry about military affairs. As long as we don't plan to strike, we won't have any problems with just me to fight."

Atou took her seat and held her head high. Her expression seemed to say, *How do you like them apples?!*

With her on their side, Mynoghra's military strength was secure. Not only that, but the Dark Elves were confident she could easily crush any enemy who came after them. Their eyes brightened with jubilation. Yet another one of their afflictions had been taken care of by their great king.

"**Atou...**"

"Yes, my liege?!"

The King called out to Atou, who was bragging about her abilities. Delighted simply by him speaking to her, Atou's face lit up

with an innocent little girl's smile as she happily turned toward the King she adored. However, contrary to the words of praise she expected to receive, she heard **"Make sure you clean this mess up"** instead.

"...Yush, sir."

Clearly, his comment to Atou implied, *Don't go destroying the forest for no reason!*

This helped everyone regain their calm. Truthfully, there was no need for her to have destroyed a piece of the forest. If anything, having to pick up the felled trees only added to their workload.

Atou walked toward the trees she cut down, shoulders slumped. Elder Moltar and Gia hated to see her like that, so they called for the Warriors and picked up the mess alongside her.

Atou cleared the downed trees with tears in her eyes over being scolded when she expected praise.

As Elder Moltar watched her back, he thought, *This young girl has power on par with an army, and that power grows daily.*

With that fact echoing in their heads, the Dark Elves cleaned up the trees with inscrutable expressions.

Eterpedia



Hero

Unit Ability

- Not affected by mental effects.
- Can never join another empire.
- Gains +2 XP every turn.

MYNOGHRA's Imperial Capital—as the small settlement was called—brimmed with activity, as if buzzing to make its growing prestige and glory known.

Having come to inspect the city that day, Takuto looked at the cityscape in awe of how much they had built up in such a short period.

“Wow! This is amazing!”

“Seeing it in person is totally different than in-game, right?” Atou said.

“Yeah, totally!”

As the Dark Elves' nutritional state improved, they grew more motivated toward their work. The place where their shabby old settlement once stood was now lined with lumber piles for construction, and Dark Elves who were older than the rest were issuing instructions in powerful and energetic voices.

When Takuto looked up at the trees, he saw buildings being constructed high above him.

Elves and Dark Elves specialized in precisely this kind of treehouse architecture that used the trees from their trunks to their canopies. These buildings supported by enormous trees that didn't exist on Earth were no different in size from those built on the ground, and it looked like an aerial city with bridges connecting the trees up high.

“How do we climb up there?” Takuto marveled.

“A guide is supposed to meet us, but I wonder where the entrance is too,” Atou replied.

“Great and mighty King, thank you for coming to do an inspection today,” someone said to Takuto as he was staring up at the treetops.

He turned toward the familiar voice to find Emle, who had been promoted from adjutant to a member of his empire-management council.

“With your permission, I will be serving as your guide.”

With his severe case of stranger anxiety, Takuto was relieved someone he knew (to a certain extent) would be his guide. Although it went without saying that Emle herself was a nervous wreck about being assigned this important role.

“Oh, you'll be our guide?” Atou said. “I look forward to your tour then. Shall we get going, King Takuto?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

And so, their inspection began. He’d been eagerly awaiting these buildings in the treetops—buildings purely of a fantasy world.

I wonder what the scenery looks like from up high.

Hyped, Takuto enthusiastically followed Emle.



THE view from the treetop buildings was superb. Takuto was initially worried he might disappoint everyone if he had a panic attack after climbing up so high, but he didn’t have any issues when he actually went up—he was more thrilled by the view than anything.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“Those are houses under construction. We haven’t made much progress with them, as we are mostly focused on growing Flesh Trees.”

Takuto and Atou followed Emle up one of the finished buildings and had their tour conducted from there. They closely examined the buildings under construction while listening to the sounds of trees being connected and builders shouting instructions to each other.

“Where are the Flesh Trees?”

“You can see the Flesh Trees being planted over there. The accompanying Storehouses have been built and the saplings are growing on schedule.”

Prompted by Emle, Takuto looked down from the building’s edge and saw strikingly distorted trees and Storehouses built around them.

“We are setting up farms and warehouses where we’ve cleared the trees. We also plan to secure a certain amount of space in anticipation of further large-scale construction projects in the future.”

They even took things into consideration that they hadn’t been instructed to and dealt with it accordingly. Takuto was impressed by their dedication to take action without detailed instructions and felt a little relieved that he didn’t need to micromanage them.

“As for a water source, we found a spring nearby, so that shouldn’t be an issue for the time being. We plan to dig a well soon.”

Emle must have tirelessly committed this report to memory. Takuto attentively listened to her fluid explanation without missing a word. His playstyle always prioritized Domestic Affairs. He loved being able to personally observe and analyze these minute details not normally depicted in-game.

“We plan to turn this building into a government office for handling civilian personnel records and paperwork.”

Takuto could tell the size of the facility from where he stood on the balcony surrounding it. It was a little too big for a house and not quite right for a major administrative building.

“Properly speaking, the administrative building should be more imposing to show off Mynoghra’s power to all who see it, but I decided to restrict it to this size as that’s an unnecessary use of our resources at this point.”

Smart decision, Takuto agreed.

What mattered right now was functionality. Excessive decorations and uselessly large buildings were costly and less beneficial. Seeing his pleased nod, Atou spoke approvingly on his behalf.

“Good thinking. We can make additions all we want later, so having minimum functionality is enough for now.”

Emle explained various other facilities to them after that. Most of the buildings were under construction, and they’d already received reports on them beforehand, so most of what she told them was just supplementary information.

In any event, the planned tour had concluded. Emle bowed to Takuto in front of the future government office to express her gratitude for him personally coming to observe the fruits of their labor.

“Is everything to your liking, Your Majesty? We Dark Elves are putting forward our utmost efforts to faithfully carry out your orders in hopes of paying back even a smidgen of the grace and mercy you have bestowed upon us,” Emle relayed with a self-conscious look on her face.

Takuto was enveloped in indescribable emotion as he sensed the firm conviction and fanatical reverence she held for him. He turned his head and looked around him.

People were bustling about busily continuing their work. As soon as anyone saw him, they swept into a deep bow, expressing their unwavering devotion.

Not long ago, they'd been withered husks on the verge of death. Faces that had once been mirrors of despair now brimmed with pride and hope.

Takuto had given them an opportunity and their souls had responded in kind. The brilliance of the soul, the strength of will, and the endless possibilities that people possessed fascinated him.

"...Yeah, I'm impressed."

The words came naturally.

"Really impressed."

His response was simple and concise, but it expressed exactly what Takuto thought, and so it reverberated with Emle. She felt something hot forming in her eyes and instinctively rubbed at them.

"I'm glad I invited you to be our citizens," Takuto said from the bottom of his heart, expressing how he felt about all the Dark Elves.

"Ahh...ahhh! We're so grateful and happy!!!"

Emle couldn't hold back her tears any longer. It felt as if all their hardship had been rewarded. As if all the suffering of their past had disappeared. The warmth that rose up from her heart flooded her eyes.

"Those are words of praise directly from your king. Make sure you share them with everyone else."

"Yes...of course!!"

Tears rolled down her cheeks, staining the ground. The occasional sob slipped out, like she was trying to stop crying in front of them and was failing horribly.

"Silly girl. I understand how you feel, but you're letting it show too much..."

"Don't cry."

Atou and Takuto had no strategy to handle this kind of situation. They simply waited for Emle to calm down.



"SNIFF! I'm so sorry for letting you see me like this!"

"It's all right. The King is sympathetic to your plight."

"Yep, yep."

Emle finally calmed down. Under normal circumstances, it's not professional to cry in front of your superiors, no matter the reason. But Takuto and Atou treated Emle with more kindness than

necessary. Takuto was especially considerate of her.

Man, that's the first time a girl's cried in front of me. I had no idea what to do! I'm glad she put herself back together!

Yes...Takuto was not patiently waiting for Emle to settle down with kingly calm. He was a panicked mess trying to figure out what to do when she suddenly broke down crying.

He started hating himself for not being able to offer a single word of consolation. He didn't realize that sometimes it was important to let a woman calm down on her own and that he wasn't wrong to let her cry it out.

"H-How are the daily necessities holding up?"

At least everything went back to normal without issue. Emle seemed fine now and had already switched back to work mode. She perfectly recited the information regarding the daily necessities he'd asked about to distract her.

"We have an overall shortage and the supply chain can't keep up. We still need to trouble you to provide those items, Your Majesty."

People need various supplies to live.

The Dark Elves lacked many necessities because they'd wandered as exiles with just the clothes on their backs. Clothes, tableware, cookware—there were a wide range of items needed for daily life, even if they limited it to the basics, and Takuto produced all of it with Emergency Production.

"I see. What is the reason for the lack of daily necessities?" Atou asked.

"There isn't enough manpower. Just preparing cotton clothes requires cotton farmers, weavers, and garment makers, and they also have to prepare the right tools for the job. Not only are there a limited number of people who can work, but we can't afford to divert anyone away from food production and construction..."

It was an easy problem to see. Mynoghra clearly lacked manpower.

Roughly five hundred Dark Elves had joined, and those numbers decreased significantly after removing babies, the sick, and the elderly who couldn't work. They couldn't extend their efforts to daily necessities.

"In other words, we still haven't reached a point of stable production. How would you like to handle the situation, King Takuto?" Atou walked up to Takuto and whispered in a voice only

he could hear.

Emle saw their desire for privacy and stepped away with her head down. Confirming she'd gone, Takuto responded to Atou the way he always did when they were alone.

"We can't do much about a limited population."

"People can't be harvested from fields like food, after all," Atou replied.

"It's not cost-efficient to summon Homunculus with Emergency Production, and no matter how many of those *things* we produce, they aren't much use in secondary industries."

Nevertheless, growing the population was an urgent matter. Takuto made a mental note to work on that next after the problems with housing and food settled down.

"Well, I'll just take care of the daily necessities for now. I'm worried the quality will suffer if we force production."

"It honestly feels like we're cheating using Emergency Production to produce steel tools," Atou said with a smile.

In fact, Takuto's use of Emergency Production was the only reason why construction progressed so quickly.

The quality of a tool directly affects the quality and output of the end project. Differences in technology can change even a simple tool such as the saw to a tool that can move civilizations into the next phase. Working with tools from his last world—from the "Land of the Gods," as Atou had put it—made it possible to build ten times faster.

"It seriously gives you a huge starting advantage. Feels like such an overpowered cheat, I'd be hesitant to use it in-game," Takuto said.

"But since this is reality—"

"—I'll use it like crazy!"

"You're such a villain, King Takuto."

"Coming out on top by cheating is so much fun!"

"It totally is!"

Takuto and Atou entered their own world as soon as Emle gave them space. And unfortunately, with Long-legged Bug out scouting, there was no one to stop them.

But they deserved to fool around a little. After all, they finally had solid proof that they could manage a stable empire.

The Mana required for Emergency Production was being produced by the Dark Elves. Their happiness was steadily increasing

and their Mana output with it. Takuto would have no problem producing the food and daily necessities needed to make them happy, at least.

In other words, their Mana balance went from negative to positive, indicating their empire had escaped ruin as long as they didn't run into any unexpected issues.

The most dangerous stage in empire management comes during the early build-up. Screwing up here could have lasting effects leading to their civilization's eventual ruin.

That was why Takuto was extremely pleased things were progressing smoothly. Not that he could relax yet. The world was full of dangers that could always threaten their peace.

Takuto was a peace-loving leader, and since he was, he'd spare no effort or action to overcome national crisis—even if that meant resorting to force.

"Anyway, as far as producing daily necessities with Emergency Production is concerned, let's do it without wasting much Mana. I don't want to reduce our extra supply needlessly and laying the foundation for our empire comes first," Takuto told Atou, suddenly turning serious.

Maybe he grew sick of their playful banter or was satisfied enough to get back to planning.

"Agreed. Your wish is my command, my liege," Atou said to Takuto, sensing the switch. She then called Emle back and started giving instructions. "Emle, let me pass down our king's orders. There is a limit to what we can do with our insufficient production capacity. First, let's focus our efforts on primary industries and anything necessary for survival.

"The King will produce daily necessities with his miraculous powers until we develop a steady means to acquire them. I am sure you're already aware of this, but you are putting a burden on the King. Make sure you don't take advantage of his mercy."

"Let me know if you have any clothing requests."

"His Majesty is specially offering to accept your clothing suggestions. Please let me know if there is anything you want enough to weep with gratitude for."

Takuto nonchalantly offered and Atou was immediately on board with it.

Emle was amazed, thinking *Where else in the world can you find someone this giving?* But then she scolded herself, for such a thought

was disrespectful toward the King's compassion.

Their king had more generosity, might, and boundless mercy than they could imagine. She had no right to begin comparing him to others.

An entity that easily transcended their imagination and common sense—such was Takuto Ira, the King of Ruin they revered.

“Oh yeah, we don’t really need a Palace yet, do we?”

Because Takuto was such a being, Emle had no trouble accepting those words came from him, but she blanched nevertheless.

“Unthinkable! In my humble opinion, it’s preposterous for us to have somewhere to live when the King does not!”

“Then I’ll just live with the rest of you.”

Takuto had taken a liking to these houses in the sky. His sentiments as a Japanese citizen also left him uninterested in spacious living quarters. He actually thought the small houses up in the trees were cool, like a tree fort. But even if he conveyed his personal feelings on the matter, the Dark Elves wouldn’t accept it.

Perhaps Emle couldn’t come up with a decent rebuttal because she lunged in front of Takuto and went down on one knee, her beautiful face whiter than a sheet.

“O-Oh great and mighty King of Ruin, Takuto Ira! Allow me to humbly offer my opinion in your supreme presence! Please, please listen to my entreaty and grant us Dark Elves the ultimate honor of building your residential palace!”

“But it costs too much to construct—”

“We will sleep on the ground then!!”

“D-Don’t do that...”

The cost of a Palace was enormous. Its construction, with their current national production capacity, would be a heavy burden.

Takuto wasn’t very interested in one either, and it ranked low on the empire-management priority list. Which was why he didn’t hesitate to put it on the backburner. But things didn’t end there.

He was thrown into an even greater panic when he saw tears forming in Emle’s deep, ocean-blue eyes.

Gah! She’s gonna cry on me again!

The King of Ruin, destined to destroy the world, had recently learned his greatest weakness was a woman’s tears.

Confirming his defeat was imminent, Takuto decided to withdraw his previous proposal. The problem now was how to tell

her.

Phrasing it badly would have the added effect of making her feel bad and any blunder on his side would end in sobs. He needed to avoid that at all costs.

Takuto looked to his trusted retainer for help. Sadly for him, Atou seemed to be deep in thought, contemplating what Emle had said. He suddenly felt like he was up a river without a paddle. Just when it seemed like he had no way out, help came from an unexpected place.

“Ho ho ho! I must also advise against that, my king.”

“Hey there, Moltar!”

Takuto couldn't help but happily greet him. His appreciation for Elder Moltar skyrocketed.

“Good day to you, King. It is I, your loyal and humble servant, Moltar. Now, back to the matter at hand. Considering our unwavering reverence for you, asking us to accept such a command is a tad cruel.”

“Hmm...”

“Where in the world can you find a loyal subject willing to commit the sacrilege of living under the same roof as their king? I realize we are being impudent raising objections about a suggestion that has come from your boundless wisdom, but please reconsider.”

There was something unsettling about being on the receiving end of so much adoration. But the Dark Elves' strong reverence for Takuto was an indisputable fact. So he decided to make use of the special phrase he once read politicians used when they talked themselves into a corner.

“Deal with the matter as you see fit.”

“Yes, sire! Everything for the King...”

Takuto glanced at Emle. He seemed to have safely escaped her tears.

“Well, we certainly can't overlook the extensive costs King Takuto's Palace requires. That said, I also want to see you living it up in a magnificent palace sooner rather than later.”

“I see.”

Atou finally returned from being lost in a sea of thought to state her opinion. Takuto felt things would've settled more smoothly if she had said so sooner, but he couldn't blame her when this whole ordeal arose from his thoughtless comment.

“Besides, a Royal Palace does generate various Resources,” she

added. “The cost may be high, but if you look at the long-term, there are pros to building one early on.”

“That’s a valid point...”

Mynoghra’s Palace has the bonus effect of producing various Resources just by being placed on the map. Its ability to produce Mana was especially appealing. Expanding and strengthening the Palace added even more bonuses.

Since it was something they had to build eventually, constructing it early on would reduce the burden on them later.

After all, there was no guarantee things would go this well in the future...

And so, Takuto was persuaded to change his policy. He’d initially planned to build the Palace once they had a little more leeway with their Resources, but taking the Dark Elves and Atou’s opinions into consideration, he allowed construction to move forward ahead of plan.

Logic alone doesn’t always lead to the best decisions. Obviously, this was another factor that differed from playing a game.

“Everyone will be happier if we do it, so even if it makes things a little tight, we should go ahead with the Palace. I really want to get my hands on a Floating Castle someday too.”

“I want one as well. After all, Floating Castle is the strongest national city in both defense and offense that you can produce at Max City Level.”

“Plus, it’s totally awesome!”

“Awesome things are always important to have, my liege!”

Takuto thought about the future.

By the time a player has reached Max City Level and fully developed their civilization, the game will be almost over, and the superior empires will already be set in stone. However, the Floating Castle still had an irresistible appeal and strength.

How awesome would it be to recreate one in this world?

Such thoughts filled his head.

But there was someone who couldn’t wrap their head around the present, much less the future—Elder Moltar.

“P-Pardon me for asking this, my king, but what in the world is a Floating Castle?”

“It’s a citadel that floats in the sky.”

“In the...sky?”

Elder Moltar had witnessed Takuto and Atou's unfathomable knowledge on countless occasions and he'd never ceased to be amazed. It was only all the more shocking with the way Takuto explained it like it was a basic concept that needed no fanfare, which left the long-lived Dark Elves gaping.

"It's a flying fortress city, to be precise," Atou interjected. "Although it moves slowly, it can function as a city in the air. You know it's even possible to fly right into the enemy's capital and commence the final battle there?"

"Pure awesomeness."

"Awesomeness is the spice of life, isn't it, King Takuto?!"

"You can use it in the final battle...?" Elder Moltar looked around them.

Mynoghra's Imperial Capital was still under development, and it was already vast. It would only grow bigger as the empire prospered.

All of that would rise into the skies and fly?

It was so unrealistic, Elder Moltar couldn't imagine it. But if the King said it was possible, then it was.

The King of Ruin, Takuto Ira, was no liar.

He spoke so often of the unimaginable as if it were as commonplace as the weather that their common sense had trouble keeping up with him. Then it must also be true that the whole Imperial Capital would someday take flight.

The King simply stated a fact.

We're just too narrow-minded, this truth shocked us into denying it.

Elder Moltar trembled with unrestrained excitement as his King showed off his infinite power.

How great and immeasurable was his power?

Emle was just as moved as her mouth hung open beside him.

The two Dark Elves were made keenly aware of how powerful and benevolent their King was. At the same time, they decided to pledge even greater loyalty to him.

"There is much for us to teach you yet. At any rate, building everyone's dwellings and Food Production facilities comes first. We expect much of you."

"Keep up the good work."

Atou and Takuto gave them words of encouragement. They said it with familiar ease, believing those were the right words for

the two council members they'd come to know, but—

“Yes, sire!”

For some bizarre reason, Elder Moltar and Emle suddenly bowed and responded with unusual ceremony.

“I solemnly swear once again upon these old bones to serve Your Majesty with my whole body and soul!”

“I will do everything in my power as well! All hail King Takuto Ira! All hail Mynoghra!”

“**Huh?!**”

“Wai— Wh-What's gotten into you lot all of a sudden?”

The two Dark Elves suddenly started to glorify and praise them. Takuto and Atou were a little put off by their behavior and twice as flustered by it, though they managed to take control of the situation, since they didn't want to look bad in front of their subordinates.



Floating Castle

National Legacy

Strength: Based on City Level

Move: 1

《Terrain Effect Immune》

《Inanimate》

《Continuous Battle》

NO IMAGE

Description

～ Isn't it unreasonable for there to be floating islands but not floating cities? ～

A Civilization can have only one Floating Castle at a time. It is a structure that can also serve as a unit. Movement and combat can happen while still functioning as a city. It's an incredibly powerful unit but pales in comparison with Hero units when it comes to combat and must be managed carefully, as it will hinder an empire's productivity.

Chapter 9: Omen

IN a metropolis of the Holy Kingdom of Qualia's Southern Province, where the provincial legislature was concentrated, a single Paladin impatiently walked through the cathedral located in this city renowned for producing grain from its fertile terrain.

"Hey, Lonius! You in here, Lonius?!"

"Yes. How may I help you, Paladin Verdel?"

A man threw open the doors with a bang and stomped into the sanctuary. His face lacked refinement, with his high cheekbones, hooked nose, and rough skin which clashed with his regal attire.

Paladins are the station above regular soldiers in the Holy Kingdom of Qualia.

In Qualia, a religious nation led by the Holy King who founded their religion, every citizen follows the same faith and prays to their god every day. It's even said that around 30 percent of the population works in religious vocations.

In a country like that, it's only natural that their military is heavily influenced by their faith. And it's the Paladins who're favored and trusted by the people.

Ranked from Under to High based on their skill, Paladins are elite soldiers who undergo rigorous trials and training. They are well-versed in various disciplines and techniques as well as martial arts. Their lineage plays the biggest part in their selection.

Paladins are indispensable elites who can work Miracles that're only surpassed by the Saints. They're usually deployed throughout the kingdom, solving domestic problems that require force, subduing the Demi-humans and Mabeasts that occasionally appear, and guarding key figures. Such is a Paladin's duty and life.

This man, famous for his crude behavior, was one of those very Paladins meant to have tireless discipline, a steely spirit, the natural virtue to lead the flock like a clergyman, and, above all, should've been baptized. He was a High Paladin named Verdel.

Paladin Lonius, who was praying at the altar, quietly looked back at Verdel, whose armor clinked as he came closer.

“This is a place of worship. Please be quiet, Sir Verdel.”

“It’s the damn Dark Continent! I don’t give a frack if it’s the northern half! It’s *still* the damn Dark Continent! Why must I go where the Barbarians live?!” Paladin Verdel howled his crass complaints.



“But we will receive Congress’ favor if this mission succeeds. And this is a holy mission bestowed upon us by Saint Soalina of Blooming Burials. There is no greater honor.”

“Hmph! We’ll see ’bout that...”

Unlike Verdel, whose vulgarity insulted their shared profession, Lonius was the model of grace and refinement. He was the model example of a Paladin, with a strength of character that could be seen from his calm demeanor and how he wore the Order’s uniform to the letter.

Being the man he was, Paladin Lonius pieced the situation together solely from Verdel’s brusque comment.

The Cursed Sea of Trees—a part of the Accursed Lands—was located in Idoragya’s southern continent. Lonius had received word just the other day that Saint Soalina had sensed an omen of apocalypse from that region and issued orders to investigate it.

The initial plan was for him to lead the reconnaissance team, so he grew skeptical when orders suddenly came from above to add a second Paladin for combat support.

The fact that this man, who had a tracklist of misdeeds and a history of problematic behavior unforgivable for a Paladin, came to Lonius to air his complaints proved that there was more going on in the background.

Various plots were at work within Qualia’s political strata.

It’s impossible to tell what even a well-behaved priest or pure sister is thinking once you peel back the layers. Did ulterior motives slip in because they’d become too large as an organized religion, or was it solely the work of sinful men...?

Assuming this investigation succeeded, all the honor and acclaim would go to Verdel. If they ran into any trouble or failed the mission, the blame would land squarely on Lonius.

Though he was talented, his lineage wasn’t up to snuff, leaving him forever stuck as an Under Paladin. He silently gnashed his teeth.

Then again, it’s not all bad having Paladin Verdel on the team.

Their chances of survival increased with his presence, so that was a plus. Although he was far from a model soldier, Verdel was still a High Paladin. His prowess was guaranteed.

Lonius, who was worried about leading his first scouting mission related to a Saint’s omen, finally felt some of the pressure

lift off his shoulders.

Survival comes first. It's not worth getting a promotion if I die in the process. Lonius thought of his beloved wife and newborn daughter. *This must be God's providence.* Naturally, he was a devout believer.

"How many troops are they sending on this mission?" he asked. "Since they sent *you* to assist me, Sir Verdel, I assume we'll be able to borrow a large number of soldiers from the Southern Province..."

"Nah, looks like it's just us... Those Congressional fat cats said to hire mercenaries in place of soldiers."

"...Huh? Why would they want that—"

"Hell if *I* know! Dammit! I don't have any connections with the Mercenary Corps! Worse yet, anyone worth a damn is off dealing with the North's problems!"

Lonius totally agreed with him there. But as a man shackled to reason, he didn't rant and rave like Verdel. Instead, he used his quick wits to turn the situation in his favor.

"Please leave the hiring to me, Sir Verdel. Some of my old friends are on good terms with the Mercenary Corps. Let me see if they can arrange something for us."

"Hm? You've got connections, Lonius? Well, damn! You're useful after all! I'll leave that annoying bit to you then!"

"Please do."

Lonius started coughing when Verdel slapped him hard on the back.

Verdel sauntered away laughing heartily, without looking back at the other man. He lacked etiquette, but he wasn't a bad person. Lonius could kind of understand why he was popular with some of the Paladins.

Still... Lonius's thoughts raced a mile a minute. *The Northern Province is under Saint Soalina's jurisdiction. Orders to investigate based on a prophecy should have gone to the Northern armies.*

But the scouting location is the Accursed Lands located within Idoragya's southern continent—commonly called the Dark Continent for a reason. It's the person in charge of the Southern Province, Qualia's closest territory, that's dispatching men... I see, so the South's assemblymen jumped at the opportunity.

Lonius silently parsed the situation further.

As long as Saint Soalina of Blooming Burials is busy handling the

North's emergency, the other Saints can't risk national defense by immediately dispatching. There are even rumors of the Veiled Saint heading North as reinforcements... This isn't the time for assemblymen to be fighting among themselves.

The Northern Disturbance was growing in scale by the day. Demi-humans, Mabeasts, and various unexplainable phenomena were causing all sorts of problems.

Even if you looked back throughout history, it was unusual for not only the Order of Paladins' main forces, but also two of Qualia's four Saints, to be dispatched to the same location.

Lonius felt indescribable unease about the North and his country's reaction to whatever was happening there.

The arrival of a prophesized apocalypse-bringer—that's what the Saint wants us to look into... I hope we can make it back alive.

Paladin Lonius began praying, hoping his prayers would drown out the anxiety crashing down on him.



“**THE** Flesh Trees have been completed on schedule. We also built a Storehouse, so we can now produce a steady supply of food for the residents of Mynoghra's Imperial Capital.”

Emle, Warrior Captain Gia's former adjutant and a current civil officer with Mynoghra, reported to Atou on the construction progress in front of a grove of eerie trees.

Several months had passed since their last inspection.

Construction of the Flesh Trees was completed and the operation seemed to be proceeding smoothly if the attached Storehouse, Management Post, and workers going between them were anything to go by.

The only two problems were its uncanny appearance and the unfortunate realization that eating its meaty fruit was akin to eating Human flesh. But living creatures are surprisingly adaptable and the mental breakdowns that'd happened at first had all but stopped.

Atou nodded with satisfaction as she listened to the report and gave her opinion on minor building improvements and upcoming policy changes.

“Good, good. It sounds like Food Production on the farms is going well, so there's no problem staying the course. Once construction of the houses is completed as planned, please start

construction of the Palace in earnest.”

Takuto and Atou were basically always in communication with each other. The King had the ability to see every aspect of his entire empire and even directly contact each person individually if he wanted to.

But perhaps it was because they’d transferred to this world together that Takuto and Atou’s connection was especially strong. Even if they were far apart, they could unconsciously share information and their opinions.

That was why Atou was in charge of inspecting and giving directions when it came to these types of facilities. Most of the Dark Elves’ problems could be solved by asking her, and they thought it disrespectful to ask the King about trivial matters.

In any case, Atou, a perfect subordinate who fully understood the King’s will, tended to leave important things out.

Actually, she left out the important details fairly often.

This time was no different.

Emle glanced around them and made up her mind. Not only had she been an adjutant to the Warriors, but she’d also served as the clan’s secretary and communications officer due to her vast knowledge. And so, she timidly brought up what’d been bothering her all this time.

“E-Excuse me...Lady Atou?”

“Yes, what is it, Emle?”

“We haven’t...been told anything about that yet...”

Her slender finger, which had regained a healthy color, pointed to the townscape, which had slightly more developed buildings than a simple settlement.

There were trees cut down according to plan, a group of aerial dwellings constructed like a beehive using the giant trees that were left behind. On the ground, food grew where seeds had been planted in the sectioned farmland. It was a residential area where simple defensive fences and wells were built, making it look more like a town, but there was something terribly wrong with it.

The original forest had died out, and what could only be described as evil-looking scenery had taken its place. The giant trees left standing had begun to warp, and terrifying colors had started to bleed into their leaves. The same distortion had reached the ground—the plants grew in frightening shapes and a veil of smoke seemed to cover the whole town.

The color of the water coming from the wells was clearly unsuitable for drinking, and it was unsettling watching the young Dark Elves calmly bathing in it.

To put it bluntly, their new home had transformed into something horrifying—terrifying even.

“Oh? I didn’t tell you? Hahaha. My bad.” Atou laughed it off with all the innocence of a schoolgirl who’d forgotten her textbook at home.

Emle was used to the evil king’s closest aide’s tendency to leave things out by now, so while she wasn’t surprised by it, she still needed to ask about what was happening to their forest.

“That’s all right. Why has the forest changed like this? Or rather...is it safe...?”

“It is. By becoming Mynoghra’s citizens, you became evil beings. Well, you probably don’t notice the difference but as you already know, that change came from the King’s glorious power. And that power not only influences his people but his land as well.”

“Th-That’s the reason for these changes...”

Atou summed up the disturbing changes with that brief response.

In other words, the land became evil like its citizens.

Emle, who still didn’t view herself as evil, tried to accept that fact though it baffled her.

“It’s called Cursed Terrain. It’s absolutely wonderful, perfect for defense as it buffs evil-aligned beings and debuffs neutral and good-aligned beings.”

“Wow... Wait, how does this buffing work for evil beings?”

Emle’s question was valid. If she was indeed evil, she should be receiving some kind of positive benefit from the land. And yet, she remained disgusted by its appearance and honestly didn’t have the best impression of it. The same went for whatever buff she was supposed to get.

Atou smiled softly, expecting her doubts.

“Please try it for yourself by taking a deep breath.”

“O-Okay!” Emle deeply inhaled and then exhaled.

“How does it feel?”

“Very refreshing despite how it looks... Kind of like getting a burst of energy?”

“That’s proof you are an evil being. You’re changing without even noticing it.”

“Oh my!” Emle squeezed her hands together in awe.

Now that she thought about it, she had eaten the mystery meat from the Flesh Tree the other day and had felt less disgusted by it than she expected. Her reaction to it was so bland she’d even thought, *It’s a little chewy, so maybe it will taste better if we slowly simmer it next time.*

Atou just said that it was surprisingly hard to tell you were becoming evil, which seemed truer by the second. The more Emle thought about it, the more she started to believe she could get along just fine living in these creepy surroundings.

In a sense, she actually preferred a quiet atmosphere untouched by outsiders. She came to accept it for what it was.

She was also being affected in more ways than one.

“But there is one big problem...it’s really conspicuous...”

A new problem arose as soon as she found a satisfactory answer to the last. This time it was Atou who brought it up. Emle had to force back her knee-jerk reaction to shout, “Of course it does!”

There was no way distorting a space this big would go unnoticed. Fortunately, this area existed inside the Accursed Lands. The colossal forest would cover them for a while until their nation prospered and expanded.

The greater chance they had of exposing themselves to the outside world, the greater the danger. Even more so for something so evil-looking.

“At any rate, it’s inevitable for our existence to become known to the outside world. Let’s enjoy the present for all it’s worth, rather than worrying about the small stuff!”

Emle stopped herself short of saying, *You just kicked the problem aside since we can’t do anything about it...*

She was talking to her superior, albeit a slightly lacking one, and the King’s confidant. Just because the other woman spoke to her so casually didn’t give her the right to rudely comment.

Besides, she could snark all she wanted, but it didn’t change the fact that Emle couldn’t think of a way to solve the issue either. In that case, it was smarter to abandon what couldn’t be fixed and turn their eyes to what could be, like Atou said.

As they’d just discussed, their existence would become known eventually. At least the existence of the great king, Takuto Ira, was not small enough to be kept secret.

Emle, however, wasn't worried.

Takuto Ira, the doomsday king who would destroy the world.

His presence gave her infinite relief, and his subordinate Atou gave her people a vision of the future in which Mynoghra's enemies would perish.

How lucky and blessed their race was!

Looking at the children running around laughing, the young people working, and the Warriors training, Emle entrusted her worries to the boundless confidence she had in her King.

The future looked bright; sadly she still had a mountain of work to do for their empire and King. Emle vowed once again to do everything in her power to secure a prosperous future.



Encroachment

Distinct Feature

- The empire's territory changes to Cursed Terrain.

- ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■

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NO IMAGE

Description

~ The world is about to perish and eventually, all things will be consumed by evil forces ~

Encroachment is one of the Distinct Features that evil-aligned Commanders may choose. It primarily changes an empire's territory into Cursed Terrain. Cursed Terrain debuffs good-aligned units and buffs evil-aligned units. Contrary to its wickedness, it is considered well-suited for players who want to focus on Domestic Affairs and defense.

Chapter 10: Clash

PALADINS Lonius and Verdel set out from the Holy Kingdom of Qualia, headed for the Accursed Lands with an expeditionary squad with a core of about fifty mercenaries they'd successfully hired.

Mercenaries and adventurers exist in this world. The entire continent hasn't been explored yet, and Idoragya is teeming with dangerous creatures such as Mabeasts and wild animals. Inevitably, the demand for those who make a living fighting had increased, and they are highly valued in both the public and private sectors for all manner of jobs.

One such mercenary company had joined the Paladins on this mission. They were the most suited for the job, having made their living exterminating Mabeasts and running scouting missions for empire expansion, rather than fighting on the front lines.

Their small squad covered ground at a good pace. But problems naturally arose along the way.

High Paladin Verdel had been pleased with Paladin Lonius's connections and mission coordination at first, but his mood soured the deeper into the forest they marched.

"Saints, I'm bored. Why the hell do I hafta be part of this mission? Dammit, I wanna go home! I'd rather be listenin' to some fancy priest's bullshit sermon back at Central than be here."

"The Northern Disturbance must be at fault. They normally would have let us form a bigger reconnaissance squad than this. The fact we're stuck at this scale goes to show how much of a bind Qualia is in right now."

"Uh-huh, you just keep thinking that..."

Verdel waved Lonius off as he walked with his mouth open in a big yawn. His firm gait, despite his heavy plated armor, was the one Paladin quality about him.

Relentless training and latent talent drew out powers ordinary people lacked.

Bargo, the leader of the mercenary corps they'd hired, joined in the conversation, as he'd witnessed firsthand the strength of the

Paladins said to do the work of hundreds of soldiers.

“The Northern Disturbance, eh? It ain’t got nothin’ to do with my boys, but sounds like they got their hands full up there...”

“Oh? You fellas aren’t going? I heard there’s a big fat bounty up for grabs, y’know?” Verdel said.

“Money’s only good if yer alive to spend it. I heard it’s pretty dangerous business. Ain’t safe for makeshift warriors like us.”

“Well, I can’t argue that. Mercenaries are bossed around even at the best of times. You’re as good as dead if you don’t know a shit job when it comes to you.”

“That’s not all... I heard them Witches are comin’ for the North.”

Both men used crass language. They seemed like they’d become quick friends at this rate, but Lonius had to sigh over their exchange which made it impossible to tell the Paladin from the mercenary. As he listened in, he tilted his head over an unfamiliar word that’d entered the conversation.

Witches.

Bargo definitely said that. Lonius had never heard it before.

Is something more happening in the North? Curious, Lonius joined in their conversation, knowing he was interrupting their fun.

“Witches? Captain Bargo, what’re you talking about? I’ve never heard of them before...”

“It’s just a rumor—”

“Saints, don’t go there! I’m bored enough as it is without you addin’ that depressing shit to it!”

“S-Sorry...”

“I just wanna finish this recon up quick and say goodbye to this place forever.”

Verdel suddenly threw a fit. It was common for this moody man to shift a conversation based on his moods, but this was too deliberate.

Lonius was suspicious of why Verdel purposefully put an end to any conversation about these Witches, but he kept his mouth shut. He knew well enough that he wouldn’t get the answer even if he asked.

“Ch-Cheer up, Pal Verdel. We’re in luck, since there’s a relatively large city for interactin’ with the neutral countries right on the border to the Dark Continent. It ain’t so bad since we can rest up there. Hella better than campin’ out here.”

“*Tch!* That’s something at least...”

“C’mon, let’s wrap up this dull mission and enjoy ourselves!”

Apparently, Captain Bargo knew the right thing to say to stop Verdel’s tantrum. Unfortunately, Lonius was still left in the dark. He couldn’t question the mercenary about the Witches with Verdel around. He was swept along with the flow, while still hung up on that word.

“Ya good with that too, Pal Lonius?”

“Yes...it’s fine.”

What are Witches? Does Paladin Verdel know?

The information disclosed to a Paladin drastically varied with their rank. It wouldn’t be strange for Verdel to have been told classified secrets an Under Paladin like Lonius wouldn’t have...

In the end, Lonius advanced to the final city with his questions left unanswered.



THE ground they had to cover for this reconnaissance mission made it difficult. While there were villages they could stop at along the way, people didn’t go near the regions close to the Dark Continent where the danger of running into Barbarians increased, inevitably making it harder to resupply.

To make matters worse, the Dark Continent was a barren land, which relentlessly limited travelers. It wouldn’t have been as bad if it was just rough roads and harsh climates, but there were numerous threats to survival, such as toxic land that was fatal just by stepping on it and forests that inflicted unknown diseases with no cures.

Therefore, invading the Dark Continent required the utmost care and the assistance of a professional guide. Even the Paladins, the pride and joy of the Holy Kingdom of Qualia, had to venture into it prepared.

It was at the last city built as a stopover point for envoys and merchants to do business with the neutral nations of Phon’kaven and Sutharland located in the Dark Continent that Lonius’s platoon enjoyed what would be their last hot meal for weeks.

“Gah!! So *this* is the last drink I’ll be able to get?! Saints save me!”

Verdel downed a whole tankard of cheap-tasting ale. He

slammed it down on the table like he was drunk, even though his unreddened cheeks attested to his strong tolerance.

“Pal Verdel...is it...*appropriate* for Paladins to drink?”

Paladins are warriors primarily tasked with fighting evil forces. But they are also supposed to be devout followers of the Holy God Arlos. Therefore, an ordained official drinking in public is looked down on in Qualia.

Captain Bargo was sweating bullets when he asked Verdel—one of those ordained officials—who started drowning himself in alcohol the second he set foot inside the tavern.

“Bah! Don’t be petty, Bargo! In thinking of his people’s suffering, the Lord our God gave permission to shed our priestly garb in our own homes before our families. In other words, he permits us to let loose after work!”

Bargo took that as a degenerate clergyman’s shady workaround to break the rules. But he was just a hired hand. Lonius may have been his direct employer, but he wasn’t going to push the topic with his employer’s superior.

What’s the most important thing for a mercenary corps? If anyone asked Bargo, he’d undoubtedly answer: “Having a silver tongue that keeps your employer pleased at all times.”

When it came down to it, mercenaries were just another type of merchant. Sure, there were a lot of criminals and has-beens who lacked tact in their corps, but as a man who’d reached leader status, Bargo wasn’t stupid enough to upset Verdel.

Such tactics were the secret to a mercenary’s success in life. The same couldn’t be said for the other Paladin, Lonius, who seemed incapable of overlooking Verdel’s sins.

“You are quoting from book 3, chapter 4, verse 3 of the *Teachings of the Holy God Arlos*, yes? He is permitting temporary relief from one’s priestly duties in the presence of family, *not* the consumption of alcohol.”

“*Mm, mm!* Looks like we’ve got a different interpretation here, Lonius. We need to discuss it at length someday! HAHA!”

Lonius rebuked Verdel for his drinking, his jaw set in a hard line. But his stern warning fell on deaf ears as the ale put the High Paladin in a good mood.

Consuming alcohol wasn’t completely forbidden by their religion. But they were taught to drink in moderation at the right time and place.

Enjoying a small amount in the privacy of their own home was fine, but their character and faith would come into question if they were caught throwing back drinks while laughing loudly in a bar like Verdel.

Lonius wondered why such an ungodly man was conferred the rank of High Paladin but grudgingly changed the topic, since he knew Verdel wouldn't right his ways.

"Anyways, Sir Verdel, about Saint Soalina's prophecy... What's *really* happening in the Accursed Lands?"

It took many days to travel to the Accursed Lands. They would have to keep walking from morning until night to get there in a decent timeframe, so they had to preserve as much physical strength as possible.

Thinking this was the last chance they'd have to discuss such a serious topic at length, Lonius voiced his concerns. Verdel's expression soured as soon as he heard his question. He was digging deeper than his rank allowed.

Bargo, who was munching on some smoked fish at the same table, grimaced without them noticing.

Verdel leaned heavily against his chair. He ran his gaze over the room, confirming the only guests were their hired men, and spoke what was, for him, a low volume.

"Hey, Bargo..."

"...We're mercenaries. Ya probably already know this, but trust matters most in this greedy line of business."

The mercenary captain, who knew exactly what was expected of him from those two words, gave the answer Verdel sought.

Basically, everything said from here on out was highly classified. Meticulous care needed to be paid to keep it secret and Verdel was confirming Bargo wouldn't leak information. And Bargo had given the perfect answer.

Mercenaries prized credibility. They were doomed to lose work and become bandits if they screwed up so bad that it damaged customer trust.

Verdel silently contemplated the matter with his arms crossed, fully aware of the creed mercenaries lived by. Lonius waited for him to speak instead of rushing him. He needed any information he could get out of his superior officer right now.

Verdel finally opened his eyes, took another look around the room, leaned closer to the table, and spoke in a voice only Lonius

and Bargo could hear.

“It’s gotta do with them Witches.”

The temperature at the table dropped a whole degree.

He couldn’t tell whether it had actually dropped, but Lonius felt a serious chill. Witches—the term he’d picked up on and dismissed that very afternoon. Determining this was his sole chance to learn more, he quickly got his question out with no heed to formalities.

“What in the name of all that is good and holy are Witches?”

“No clue,” Verdel said as he brought the tankard to his lips. Annoyed to find it empty, he called out to the bartender for a refill.

Lonius and Verdel’s relationship didn’t go back far, although it wasn’t that recent either. Realizing further questioning would only be deflected, Lonius gritted his teeth and pondered what was being unsaid.

Whether he felt bad leaving him in the dark or just wanted to gain favor with his employer, Bargo offered Lonius the modest amount of intel he had on the subject.

“They say all that mayhem in the North is Witches’ doin’.”

“Witches... So there’s more than one?”

“We think it’s jargon made up by some evil cult or Mabeasts. Nobody can say for sure, though...”

Bargo knew this much simply because he was a mercenary corps captain. Mercenaries put themselves where the danger was and made a tidy sum off it.

Information was the greatest currency and the price for not having enough was their very lives. Collecting even the tiniest scrap of info wherever he could was what made him privy to knowledge even an Under Paladin like Lonius didn’t have.

“No mercenary has seen it for themselves? Any of you boys have comrades with more information?”

“You should know this better than we do, but the North is in dire straits. I had a buddy up there and I can’t even get in contact with ’im anymore.”

The Holy Kingdom of Qualia’s Northern Province—the region currently suffering a maelstrom of chaos and destruction ever since these Witches suddenly appeared. Thousands of mercenaries were lured by the temptingly large bounties into handling things there.

Not all mercenaries, however, are blinded by gold. Some put their lives and safety before promised money. And those were the

very mercenaries Lonius had hired for this job.

“With all hell breakin’ loose, there’s no way scaredy-cats like us would risk our necks just to take a peek. So we’re keepin’ our heads low and doin’ jobs in the South instead. Safety first, y’know?” Bargo shrugged.

They had survived this long as mercenaries—an occupation with a high mortality rate—because they knew how to weigh the odds. Lonius could sense a strong will to live from Bargo’s unabashed declaration that his men were cowards and scaredy-cats.

Did he find Bargo’s convictions admirable? Or was he just sick of keeping quiet? Whatever the reason, Verdel accepted the foamy tankard from the bartender and merrily rejoined the conversation.

“You can’t have any fun if you don’t live to enjoy the day! Ain’t nothing wrong with staying on the safe side.”

“Yeah, but that ain’t all, Pal Verdel. I’ve got somebody waitin’ back home to do... certain things with me, you see. She’s a prostitute but you couldn’t find a better woman.” Bargo held up his pinky finger, cheeks flushed.

Amused by his lewd gesture, Verdel’s stern expression melted into a wide grin as he clapped Bargo on the back.

“No way, man! You’ve got a woman?! Just quit this dangerous business, then! I’d be happy to introduce you to better work! I’ve got good connections in the South!”

“*Heh heh.* You mean it? I wasn’t planning on retiring until I saved up some more and had a replacement in place, but I’d be livin’ it up good under your care.”

“Yeah, you do that!”

Bargo closed the distance with Verdel, who’d become moody, and made the conversation take off. Lonius was impressed by his expertise in grasping the human heart.

Who knew if the mercenary captain actually *had* a lover back home? But just bringing it up pulled Verdel out of his shell and even got him to offer work connections.

He’s likely after information.

Just as Lonius predicted, Bargo scratched his head awkwardly and broached the real subject while Verdel was in a teasing mood.

“You heard what cowards we are, Pal Verdel. We ain’t gonna just happily go where the Witches are, y’know? How do I put it... my woman, her name’s Calico... I can’t go dyin’ now that things are getting good if ya know what I mean.”

“*Hm?* That wouldn’t be good, would it?” Verdel paused for a long minute but eventually answered. “Nah, you don’t have to worry about them. We’ve got a basic idea of what we’re getting into.”

Verdel was disclosing one of Qualia’s highly confidential secrets. Lonius listened in close, making sure he didn’t miss a single word.

“And what might that be?” Bargo asked.

“Dark Elves took refuge in this region. My hunch is that we’re going to inspect the possibility of them causin’ trouble there.”

Lonius had also heard the news about the Dark Elves. It was said they’d turned their backs on all that was holy and devoted themselves to evil thoughts. Lonius was enraged when he heard of their folly and imprudence, rejecting God’s love like that. It all made sense if the prophecy referred to them.

“Dark Elves, eh? I’d heard rumors they were exiled from El-Nah, but who whudda thought they’d made their getaway to the Accursed Lands...”

“That region’s always been shady as hell. Maybe they’re trying to start up some sorta wicked cult or something?”

Not even Verdel seemed to know more than that. But that alone was valuable information. Lonius knew the dangers Dark Elves posed, after all.

“They’re startin’ up an evil cult?” Bargo scratched his chin. “I’d normally like to laugh that off, but it actually seems likely. Curses and assassinations are the first things that come to mind when ya think of Dark Elves. Rumor has it that the infamous named ones with bounties on their heads are still on the run too. Who knows what a group of ’em will get up to...”

“The Curse Sage Moltar and Gia the Assassin, huh?” Verdel leaned back in his chair. “Both are first-class bounties. I once crossed blades with Moltar and he’s quite the formidable enemy.”

Lonius’s eyes went wide as he finally realized the danger they posed. If the Dark Elves, known for their curses and assassination techniques, had improved their skills in hiding, they’d eventually turn their blade on the united front of the Holy Kingdom of Qualia and the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals.

How many innocent lives would be harmed when that happened?

Lonius clenched his fists.

“Well, we’ve only got orders to run recon,” Verdel said. “Don’t cause a scene even if you see them Dark Elves. Hightail it outta there if things go south.”

“Good to know. That’s enough to keep my boys happy,” Bargo said with an ingratiating bow.

He was truly a masterful conversationalist. Though he’d failed to pry out more intel on the Witches, he’d pulled enough information from Verdel to guarantee his men’s safety.

Lonius was stunned by Bargo’s resourcefulness. Meanwhile, the convictions and sense of justice that made up the core of his being couldn’t let what Verdel said pass.

“Hold on, Sir Verdel. Is it really appropriate for one of God’s vanguards, a Paladin, to say something like that? Shouldn’t we thoroughly eradicate the threat of evil if it’s taken root there?”

Lonius was of the opinion they should immediately eliminate a known threat. Throughout his career as a Paladin, he’d witnessed many situations where slow decision-making had caused serious tragedy. He despised how Qualia’s complex political system had the harmful effect of giving a grace period to the wicked.

He may have only made his comment out of a brazenness that comes from youth, but there was indeed some insight and validity to it. Which was why Verdel answered him seriously.

“Lonius.”

“Yes? What is it, Sir Verdel?”

“Here’s a piece of sage advice from your superior. Everyone’s impatient to prove themselves when they’re young. But those pretty words from the old bats at the cathedrals and the shiny medals aren’t worth shit in the long run. If you pursue only instant results, you’ll eventually make a fatal mistake. Develop an eye for the big picture. Got that?”

That doesn’t answer my question, Lonius concluded.

Verdel’s advice didn’t strike a chord with him. He would be lying if he said he wasn’t trying to prove himself, but he hadn’t once forgotten his duty as God’s disciple. His pride refused to accept Verdel’s advice for what it was.

“Sometimes, as faithful servants of our Lord, we have to lay down our lives to fight evil. But that isn’t something we should rush into. You and I have reasons not to throw away our lives—the same goes for Bargo here. That’s why...”

After a slight pause, Verdel looked around and finally realized

the funny faces Lonius and Bargo were giving him. He gave his head a firm shake and downed a glass of water instead of ale, as if to signal he drank too much.

“Ack! Gettin’ old makes you a nag! I’ll leave the lectures to the old bats at the cathedrals!”

Thus, Verdel’s sermon disappeared into the hustle and bustle of the night without coming to an end.



THE reconnaissance team finally set foot inside the Dark Continent the next day. They couldn’t hide their grim expressions when they saw the scenery that starkly contrasted the flourishing landscapes located within the Holy Kingdom of Qualia which was blessed by Arlos.

Red, barren land stretched endlessly around them. Enormous, rugged boulders stuck out of the ground here and there, blocking their path.

At first glance, the sky seemed blue, but the weather could change at any minute. The region clearly had poor drainage—any rain would cause a flood.

This land’s natural state seemed to reject life and perfectly fit the name the Dark Continent.

“Barren as far as the eye can see. Some vegetation seems to grow here, but you can barely feel any life from it,” Lonius muttered, scooping some of the sand off the ground. This was his first time venturing into the Dark Continent.

Across from him, Verdel kept his gaze trained forward, looking more pensive than usual. “It’s like this everywhere,” he said. “Just when you think there’s a better spot, it’s got a name like the Accused Lands, Viper Meadows, Drunken Swamp, and whatnot. Ain’t a decent place for Humans to live.”

“But aren’t there several neutral nations here?”

“Yeah. They’re struggling just to survive.”

I can see why with terrain like this, Lonius thought.

A single look around made him doubt much could grow there. If everywhere else was just as bad, how in the world did they survive? Or rather, the real question was: why were they even *trying* to survive in such a place?

“The other nations will receive God’s blessing if they just show

allegiance to us...”

His comment received no response. Lonius looked up to find Verdel was in the middle of saying something to Bargo and had missed what he said. The two men seemed to be discussing the path they'd be taking through these Accursed Lands.

After finishing the briefing session with the mercenary guide, the reconnaissance team began down a pathless road. There were no easy-to-follow landmarks, and it was hard to tell what direction they were going. It was only their sheer skill and preparation that made it possible to confidently continue down the path they were on.

“...I've gotta say, we've got a good band of mercenaries right here.”

Verdel spoke after they'd trudged in silence for a while. He meant what he said. Glancing at his satisfied side profile, Lonius strongly agreed with his appraisal of the mercenaries he'd hired.

“They are a skilled group of men. They could play an integral role in our forces if they joined the Provincial Guard. But they continue this way of life because they don't like belonging to organized groups.”

“Hmph. Can't we just slap some sense into 'em? I'll happily do it myself.”

Verdel grinned at the mercenaries, already working out a plan to absorb them into the armed forces without their knowledge. They would become invaluable soldiers if they went through Verdel's infamously fierce boot camp. But training soldiers was not a Paladin's job.

Paladins had more work than they had time. Besides, they couldn't spare one of the few dozen Upper Paladins assigned to each province to something as meaningless as training a mercenary band.

Verdel's plan was near impossible to make a reality, regardless of his personal desire to do it.

“Paladins have much to do. You make it sound too easy to—” Lonius began lecturing Verdel with a sigh when a shout cut him off.

“It's a Hill Giant!!”

One of the mercenaries warned from the vanguard.

Verdel and Lonius immediately drew their swords. Their relaxed expressions were replaced with a sharp glint in their eyes

and the steely resolve to overpower any enemy.

The fifty mercenaries stopped all at once and Captain Bargo, Verdel, and Lonius headed to the point of concern, just as a giant humanoid monster appeared from the shadow of a rock tower.

Hill Giants—the Barbarian race that primarily resided within the Dark Continent. They stood over ten feet tall. Monsters that easily exceeded a two-story building could kill a Human with a single blow from its huge body.

To make matters worse, its skin was harder than rock and couldn't be scratched with normal weapons. Even Qualia's main army needed to be prepared to lose men to defeat one of these evil brutes. The losses would be even greater for a band of mercenaries.

"Damn! We ran into a hell a nasty one right out the gate! Get ready for battle, boys! Move the wagons back and bring out the bows!"

The mercenaries moved like a single living creature when Bargo barked their orders. The supply wagon retreated to the back of the group, and the cavalry moved forward to divert the giant's attention. The infantrymen held their swords at the ready in front of the Hill Giant, and the archers climbed the rocks to get to higher ground.

Lonius stared down the Hill Giant, who approached them with glee, while also confirming the mercenary band had moved into position, their coordination so perfect even a famous strategist would be impressed.

"How fitting for the Dark Continent. Evil beings act like they own the place."

Lonius may have been lower-ranked, but he was still one of the Holy King's Paladins tasked with annihilating all evil. Neither his mind nor resolve were so weak as to buckle with fear before such threats.

But the reality was that Hill Giants posed a grave danger that couldn't be underestimated.

The strength of Qualia's Paladins can be roughly estimated by their court rank. Any Paladin, even an Under Paladin, is a force to be reckoned with. Their strength is equivalent to an Ogre Class Barbarian. But they are outclassed by the even stronger Hill Giants.

"Sorry to bother ya, Sir Paladins, but can ya lend us a hand? This ain't one we can take down on our own without losses."

"Of course, Bargo. Create a diversion with a volley of arrows.

We'll deliver the killing blow while it is distracted."

Captain Bargo requested help as Lonius thought he would. Their contract covered the mercenaries guiding and guarding them to and from the Accursed Lands.

Skirmishes along the way were included in the terms of the contract, so the Paladins weren't expected to partake in any of the fighting. But this encounter was outside expectations. They were in no position to squabble over a breach in contract.

The Dark Continent's Barbarians were more ferocious and heinous than Lonius anticipated. His hands turned cold and clammy as he realized his hunch that they wouldn't meet anything worse than an Ogre Class was proven horribly wrong.

"Nah, I'll handle it alone."

One man stepped forward with the sound of his plate armor clinking. As soon as Lonius realized it was Verdel, the High Paladin tasked with the same scouting mission, he confirmed his intentions without letting his emotion show.

"...Are you certain?"

"Eh, it's no skin off my back. Can't let this small fry hold us up."

Lonius was shocked Verdel was motivated to do anything when he was the poster child for self-serving laziness. He considered offering assistance, but held his tongue since he feared the potential consequences of upsetting him. He also wanted to get a handle on Verdel's strength.

"The archers will distract him first, Pal Verdel," Bargo said. "Friendly fire ain't pretty, so would you mind waiting until I give the signal to go?"

"Nah, I don't need archer support. Can't have the giant gunning for our archers, either. You fellas can sit this one out, Bargo."

"A-Are you positive—"

—*that's smart?* Bargo stopped short of finishing his sentence. He'd often heard rumors of how powerful Paladins were.

They were men of valor said to be a match for a thousand soldiers, and martial arts experts wouldn't even be a good match for them. High Paladins, in particular, had surpassed the realm of what was humanly possible. Those things were common knowledge. But even if that information was true, fighting a Hill Giant completely alone was unfeasible.

Bargo's ability to manage risk as a mercenary captain had him view Verdel's decision as reckless. They were in a crisis. He didn't have the time to slyly talk him down like he had in the tavern last night.

Not wanting to make things worse, Bargo looked to Lonius to do something about it. Unfortunately for him, Lonius merely shook his head, his eyes squeezed shut.

"It's fine, Bargo. Please do as Sir Verdel says."

"But—Never mind. We'll follow orders."

Bargo gave up, knowing there was nothing left for him to say. In the end, he and his men were nothing more than hired mercenaries. They had no right or reason to disobey their employers over being told to sit out a fight.

The mercenary captain decided to see how things played out, all the while planning an escape if things went south.

"O Lord, our maker! Grant me the strength to stand against evil!"

As soon as Verdel spoke, something holy sprung forth around him. The Hill Giant switched targets to Verdel, as if he sensed the change in the air.

Verdel squared off with the Hill Giant. He began spinning his two-handed sword in a unique manner.

"Is that one of 'em Holy Sword Artes?" Bargo asked Lonius from where they watched the action at a distance.

"Yes. It's a secret technique Qualia developed to strengthen the body with divine power by praying to our Lord while using a Sword Arte. Not only does it increase your combat abilities, but it also gives you massive advantages against evil."

Holy Sword Artes were the reason Qualia was both a mighty religious empire *and* a mighty militaristic one. These Artes, which even regular soldiers could use the most basic forms of, were extremely effective against the forces of evil when used by Paladins at the highest level.

Even the Hill Giant, who was supposed to be a neutrally-aligned Barbarian, seemed hesitant to go up against Verdel's holy power.

"Will he really be all right? Whole mercenary companies are dispatched to take down Hill Giants, y'know? I don't care how high up Sir Verdel is in the ranks, a single Paladin can't possibly..."

Bargo still couldn't gauge Verdel's strength. The mercenary

profession required caution to survive. Bargo was the particularly cautious type. That prudence made him apprehensive of the risks of taking on a Hill Giant alone. But his fears were about to be proven unnecessary.

“Watch. It’s starting.”

Bargo quickly shifted his gaze from Lonius to Verdel. At almost the same time, the Hill Giant brought his large fist down on Verdel.

“LOOK OUT!!”

“That’s nothing.”

Verdel switched from defense to offense in a split second.

“...Ha!”

“GRUOOOOH?!”

Verdel dodged the Hill Giant’s blow with agile movements that seemed impossible with his heavy plate armor and spun his sword around to slice its arm with minimal effort.

“Weak! You can’t defeat me with just a big body!”

The Hill Giant was enraged by the blood gushing from its arm. Anger was clearly visible on its ugly face as it tried to swing its fist down a second time.

But—

“GAGH?!”

Its legs buckled.

When exactly did that happen? Lonius thought.

At some point, Verdel’s refined Special Arte had severed the giant’s tendons.

“GRUOOOOOOOH!!”

It was, quite literally, a one-sided battle.

Every one of the Hill Giant’s attacks were evaded, and each time, its skin renowned for being tougher than rocks was wounded. And those wounds weren’t just nicks and scratches. One arm was severed and its bowels spilled from its abdomen.

Each slash from Verdel’s sword had the power to slaughter the heinous monsters of the Dark Continent.

The victor was decided before long.

The final moment was cinched when the Hill Giant had fallen to its knees after having an ankle severed and the dizziness brought about by grievous wounds caused its head to fall forward.

Verdel rushed up to its giant body faster than the eye could follow and brought his Paladin Sword down on its head.

...The strength of a Paladin can be roughly estimated by their

court rank.

An Under Paladin stands on par with an Ogre.

A Mesial Paladin stands on par with a Lich.

And a High Paladin...

“URAAHHH!”

“GUGYAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

A High Paladin stands on par with a Lesser Dragon.

“Unbelievable...” Lonius muttered in awe.

The single blow that bashed in the Hill Giant’s head was stronger than any before it. Despite being attacked by a puny Human sword, the Hill Giant’s head burst open, and its brains splattered on the ground, like it had been crushed by a huge battering ram.

The combination of a High Paladin’s extraordinary physical strength with the buff granted by Arlos’s blessing made it possible to easily crack the monster’s iron skull and end its life in an instant.

Verdel spun his two-handed sword. The gore on the blade splattered a red line on the ground, signaling the battle’s end.

“You’re amazin’, Pal Verdel! You wiped the floor with that Hill Giant!”

“Hey now, don’t go letting down your guard. If you’ve got time to be happy, get ready to move out. It’ll be a hassle if Mabeasts are lured by the scent of blood,” Verdel said, scowling at Bargo, who’d come running over all excited.

The mercenaries were whooping after witnessing a fight fit for the history books. Verdel’s scowl deepened over the weakness they were showing in that moment, but he knew their excitement wouldn’t subside even if he complained, so he just clucked his tongue and said no more.

“That was a remarkable fight, Sir Verdel. With your power, solving the problem in the Accursed Land should be a breeze.”

“Tch. I wonder about that...”

He didn’t take well to Lonius’s compliments either.

What was bothering him so much? Whatever it was, Verdel was in a foul mood to the last.



High Paladin Verdel

Combat Unit

Strength: 7 Move: 1

《Holy》

《Holy Sword Artes》

《Faith》



Description

～ The forces of good's warrior of light ～

The High Paladin is a unit unique to the Holy Kingdom of Qualia. Strong against evil forces, they receive special buffs that make them capable of even competing with stronger units. On the down side, they lack any other remarkable buffs, which makes them less useful against good or neutral-aligned forces.



THE Dark Elves had cleared a section of the forest to make space for Ceremonial Grounds between the site where Takuto's residential Palace was going to be built and where the citizens resided. It was a simple space Atou made by ripping out the trees, roots and all, to level the ground where they then randomly lined up stones they'd found lying around.

But as simple as it was, it served a strategic purpose for Mynoghra.

"King Takuto, it's ready for you. We have the exact amount of food needed."

"Okay, thanks, Atou."

Food was piled up in the center of the Ceremonial Grounds. The terrifying chunks of meat from the Flesh Trees made up most of the pile, but some of the crops harvested from the newly created farmlands peeked out from between the fleshy fruit too.

Takuto walked up to the mountain of food and held his palm over it. The food instantly warped and started to pulsate as if it was being condensed into the middle. It convulsed into a single lump as it throbbed. The color and shape changed until it became a lump of flesh. All the while, bluish-white magic light poured onto it from Takuto's palm.

The magic's linear path wrapped around the fleshy lump, spinning it round and round until it gradually whipped it into shape.

Something was about to be born.

Atou watched Takuto work with exhilaration as life was evidently being breathed into the lump. Eventually, the faint light emitted by his Mana stopped, and something covered in sticky goo plopped onto the ground.

"GYEEEEEEEEEE!"

It was a Long-legged Bug, Mynoghra's Scout unit, that let out a familiar cry.

"Wonderful work as always, King Takuto. Allow me to express my delight over the successful birth of a new unit."

"Thanks. I'm glad it went well, Atou. I was worried it wouldn't work."

Takuto placed his hand on his chest and let his relief show.

Atou raced over to encourage him.

Mynoghra finally had a solid foundation as a budding empire and a little more freedom in its productivity, so he decided to experiment by producing units the normal way. He was a tad nervous because he had never tried any of this before, but with the guidance of some mysterious knowledge stored in the back of his mind, he completed the process without any hiccups.

"I had no idea it worked like this while playing the game, but it's kinda entertaining to think this is how all the units were produced."

"I agree. Who would have thought they could be produced by manually gathering the required Food and Resources in one place and mixing them together with a dash of Mana... What kind of system is at work here?"

"The Eterpedia in my head doesn't say anything more about it..."

Takuto had died in his world and been reborn as one of *Eternal Nations'* commanders. He could only perform the same actions he would in-game, which differed on many levels from this world, thanks to the mysterious information that flowed into his mind.

Takuto named the information that popped into his mind whenever he had any questions Brain Eterpedia after the Eterpedia glossary and help menu in *Eternal Nations*.

He used the Eterpedia to learn how to produce units with the Ceremonial Grounds. In the game, all he had to do was select the unit he needed from the list and click the Production Icon, but certain rituals were required to do the same in this world.

Why did he even *have* a Brain Eterpedia? Why did it list every kind of ritual and the steps from A to Z? For that matter, why were they even in this world?

The answers to those questions never entered his mind, which meant the system running his Brain Eterpedia was incredibly limited.

"I see. So, we know how to use the system, just not how it works. In that case, we need to continue experimenting, investigating, and theorizing about it..."

"Yeah. I'd say so, Atou." Takuto turned from Atou to his new Scout. "Okay, my newest bug, cooperate with the other bug scouting the areas outside the forest."

"GYEEEEEEEEEE!"

The Long-legged Bug disappeared into the forest depths, letting out its usual high-strung shriek. As she watched it go, Atou asked Takuto about his strategy.

“By the way, have you figured out what goes into spawning military Squads yet? We’ve only spawned single units so far.”

“My Brain Eterpedia covers it, but it looks like creating Squads requires specific citizen units as a base. For example, if you want to make a Cavalry, you need a thousand horses, a thousand volunteer soldiers, and the Resources, Mana, and Training time to equip them. And if that’s not bad enough, they need a ton of Food every month to maintain!”

“The system is really unbalanced, isn’t it? Or is it just too easy to produce individual units? I think it’s best to solidify our forces around a few select Hero units, after all. Oh...now I get it! That’s why you chose the Long-legged Bug!”

“Yep, Long-legged Bugs can be upgraded to Headhunting Bugs in the Technology tree. Once they’re upgraded, they’re only slightly weaker than the Calvary units we just discussed. They’re way more cost-effective.”

Some units, including Long-legged Bugs, can be upgraded. Upgrading is the way to transform a unit into a more powerful version by applying new technologies and resources. Long-legged Bugs fall under the upgradeable unit category and can be upgraded twice once the Technology tree requirements are met. The cost stays low, as it still counts as single-unit production and is an insect-class unit.

Atou’s eyes lit up as she pieced the information together to see the overarching strategy.

“Oh! Now I know where you’re going with this, my liege! The next Hero unit will be—”

“I debated it, but I’m going with Isla, Queen of the Bugs.”

“I *knew* it would be Isla! She’s quite the overpowered character, after all!”

Isla, Queen of the Bugs is one of Mynoghra’s unique Hero units. She’s an insect-class Hero unit with overwhelmingly powerful traits. One of her traits is the permanent enhancement of all insect units. The enhancement value is an extraordinary +2 and the effect can be obtained without any debuffs.

This ability to turn a Long-legged Bug, a Scout unit, into a first-class combat unit is an advantage that can be used in the early

stages of the game and the final stages. The benefits are immeasurable, as it gives bonuses to several other insect-class units.

In fact, most of *Eternal Nations*' players who play as Mynoghra summon Isla over Atou. That goes to show just how powerful and perfectly in line this Hero unit is with Mynoghra.

"Isla can also produce various Larva units in addition to strengthening other insects. She doesn't have the highest Strength, but her Breeder skill that can be used in both Domestic Affairs and Warfare is game-changing."

"You made a wonderful choice, King Takuto! This will solve our labor problem too!"

Larva, the special units bred by Isla, aren't the most efficient. But they can be used to cultivate land and for production, freeing up workers. Although a large amount of Food is required to activate and maintain the Larva, it's beneficial in the long run to be able to produce lots of workers without having to wait for the empire's population to grow.

Takuto hadn't realized it sooner because he rarely used Isla as a part of his game strategy, but she was the best possible Hero to summon at a time like this. There were other Hero units to pick from, but they were all too specialized in one or two things to be useful right now.

Atou applauded Takuto's choice as she rummaged through her memories to recall the distinct traits of the several Hero units they could pick from. Takuto seemed happy to receive her approval as well.

"It's a popular early game tactic for Mynoghra, right? Seeing how a lot of players start there, it's a safe play, I'd say."

"I personally find it boring, though," Takuto groaned. "But sticking to hardcore play in real life is dumb. Gotta use what we can to our advantage."

"You can say that again, my liege. Speaking of which, what do you have in mind for our strategy after Isla?"

Atou asked about what Takuto had planned next before they even began the summoning process for Isla. She asked partially because she enjoyed exchanging empire-management ideas with him and knowing his plans let her assist him better.

Unaware of his confidant's inspiring reasoning for her question, Takuto unveiled his strategy simply because he enjoyed discussing empire management with her.

“Good question. After securing our production capacity with Isla’s Larva, I’ll make a few Mi-Go.”

“Oh yes, the Medic support units, right? They improve the empire’s hygiene even during peacetime and they can be used to heal other units during battle. And the most wonderful thing about them is that they’re a single unit, which keeps Upkeep costs down.”

Medic support units can heal injured units on the battlefield. Additionally, stationing them in a city improves that city’s sanitation.

The forces of evil might not have to worry about hygiene much, but the Medics were a great choice because they could also take care of elements that weren’t in the game, such as healing sick or injured citizens outside of battle.

“Our combat capabilities shouldn’t be a problem for now with Medics and Headhunting Bugs on our side. But even with Isla’s abilities active, I’m worried the Long-legged Bug series won’t be strong enough,” Atou said, voicing her concerns.

Waging war with bugs using Isla is a powerful strategy during early game, but starts losing its edge by mid-game. Mynoghra’s Bug-class units alone can’t keep up with the severely inflated endgame encounters.

Takuto knew this would be a problem. He addressed Atou’s concerns while reaffirming his own knowledge.

“I agree. The strongest Bug unit Mynoghra can make is the Hungry-hungry Blue Bug that the Headhunting Bugs can upgrade to, but...there’s a limit to how many you can have, and they’re ridiculously slow, which makes them tricky to use.”

“I *do* love them Hungry-hungry Blues, though.”

“So do I... Anyway, the standard tactic here is to produce a ton of Magic Archers or Elite Knights, but...I think Shoggoth is what we want. I like them personally too.”

Atou silently contemplated Takuto’s plan for a moment. As he’d said, players typically spawn high-end units that are cheap and have a certain level of strength, rather than Shoggoth, which has a relatively high production cost but low Upkeep.

She slapped her hands together as she realized Military units cost a ridiculous amount when you added their Upkeep to the initial production costs.

“I get it! Unlike in the game, an individual unit like Shoggoth has a much cheaper total cost than a Squad, right?”

“Exactly. You could say Military units cost too much in general, but the huge variation in Upkeep between Squads and individual units makes all the difference in the long run. I just added up the numbers and Shoggoth is the overwhelmingly better value.”

“So, basically, we can use Shoggoth all we want this time around? They took so much to produce in the game, too! But they’re practically a bargain with the cheap Upkeep costs here...”

Tears clouded Atou’s eyes as she became thrilled with the idea. She seemed to have forgotten these Combat units called Shoggoth were a thousand times more grotesque than the Long-legged Bugs.

“Yep. We’ll have the perfect defense once we make the Shoggoth Lords unique to Mynoghra too. We can only have three at once, but I’m sure we’ll have most of the Hero units summoned by then anyway.”

Shoggoth is a unit that can be produced around mid-game. They are a useful unit that can be used well into endgame by upgrading them with the Technology tree. In-game, their high production and Upkeep costs were a problem, but they had the solution to that now.

Atou couldn’t hide her excitement over this strategy that felt like a mod customized just for their needs.

“Aaahh! It brings me back to the good old days! Back to when Shoggoth sprung infinitely from the Floating Castle and attacked the enemy cities with violent productivity! To when the enemy defenses melted away at laughable speed! When Hungry-hungry Blues slipped into the enemy city during the ruckus to devour their citizens! How satisfying it was to go around destroying the overwhelmingly powerful forces of good with even more transcendental power! ...Peace talks? In your *dreams*!”

Atou spoke at breakneck speed while waving her arms like a little girl excitedly discussing her favorite things. Her enthusiasm spread to Takuto, rousing the same excitement in him.

“Yeah. Yeah! You destroyed the main enemy forces, growing even stronger until you obliterated every last unit. Our invincible army built around units with a high continuous battle rate led the world to ruin. It was so much fun!”

“You filled the map with so many units, your computer kept freezing too! Let’s do the same thing here!”

“I’m definitely not keen on filling the world with so many

Shoggoths it freezes, but I'm all for building up our forces to take on the whole world."

They were just two young adults passionately talking about their favorite game. It probably looked silly to anyone watching from the outside. But to Takuto and Atou, what the rest of the world thought didn't matter when they had their most important person right there. So they were able to enjoy the moment.

"Aww... Looking down from the top of the Floating Castle with you as the land below burns... Wouldn't that be *wonderful*, King Takuto?"

"*Haha!* I can only pray it doesn't come to that."

"True. Peace for the win! I also feel a greater value in these idyllic days spent chatting with you."

Conquering the world was a means, not an end, to them. Their objective was to live in peace and build an empire just for them. Neither had forgotten that.

"I'm glad you're on the same page as me, Atou."

"Well, some Heroes love conquering the world, and others love to engulf it in turmoil..."

"We'll have them join us someday too, huh? We need their abilities, and I personally want to meet them, but...I sure hope they don't cause trouble."

"The rest after Isla have terrible personalities."

Mynoghra's other Hero profiles came to mind. All of them had every screw loose—not just a few—and they were like problematic children Takuto worried he wouldn't be able to stop if they went on a rampage.

Silence hung over them as their enthusiasm died.

"I hope we can live in peace..."

"I hope we can just live in peace..."

Funnily enough, they said almost the same thing at the same time. They both secretly wished they'd stop being perfectly in sync for these things.

They found themselves in an indescribable mood after that, until Atou suddenly looked up at Takuto.

"Say, King Takuto..."

"Hm? What is it, Atou?"

"Have we *ever* succeeded in getting a Peace Victory?"

Cold, hard reality struck them.

A Peace Victory is one of several victory conditions in *Eternal*

Nations. As the name implies, it's the victory condition preferred by pacifist players, achieved by building up a certain level of friendship with every empire.

“.....”

Takuto fell silent, after which he forced himself to speak.

“A-A few times. We pulled it off at least a FEW times!!”

“L-Let's not talk about it! No more of this topic! Nope!”

Mynoghra plunged headfirst into war every game session, all while Takuto insisted on pacifism. Atou shouted, forcefully bringing the conversation to a close as if to hide that fact.

Dark clouds still hung over Mynoghra's future.



Hungry-hungry Blue Bug

Combat Unit

Strength : 10 **Move : 0.5**

《Evil》《Citizen Predation》

《City Raider》

※ This unit can recover HP by devouring citizens.

※ This unit can recover an ally unit's HP by devouring citizens.

※ Only 5 of these units can exist within the empire at the same time.

NO IMAGE

Description

～ Hungry-hungry Blues! Everyone's strong, buggy friend! He LOVES humans so much he could just EAT them up. ～

Hungry-hungry Blue Bug is a unit unique to Mynoghra. It's slow and lacks strength, but has a powerful city-invasion buff. It can also damage enemy citizens and restore its own HP along with ally HP. Making use of them during city raids will bring satisfying results.



TAKUTO and Atou had successfully spawned a unit and laid out the plans for their future military strategies. Although they spent some time messing around during the planning, it was still morning when they wrapped things up.

Takuto had conducted his experiment in the early morning in case any problems arose. Since he finished much sooner than expected, he headed back to the Palace Construction Site to enjoy a relaxing breakfast with Atou.

Atou happily followed him in the best of moods, delighted to spend even more time alone with her king. They hadn't had as much time together lately with all the projects she was overseeing.

Lots of materials had been carried into the planned construction site for the Palace, where Takuto and Atou had moved the stone dais to. The building project was progressing smoothly.

They didn't have a large Dark Elf population to start with, and the number of people they could devote to construction was limited. As a result, the structure was more of a large mansion rather than a palace. Still, it would undoubtedly become a magnificent royal residence assembled with a unique architectural style.

Takuto would eventually grow this town into a huge city worthy of being Mynoghra's Imperial Capital, and he'd make his Palace large enough to pierce the heavens.

Dreaming of looking down from the top floor of his Palace, which hadn't yet taken shape, he entered the tent built around the stone dais and sat cross-legged in front of the table the Dark Elves had cobbled together.

"C'mon, let's have breakfast. The Dark Elves made such an amazing table and rug for us, we must use them to their fullest."

"It's crafted from a simple piece of wood and isn't of the quality fit for a king if you ask me."

The rug was coarse and the table a plain slice of round wood cut straight out of a giant tree trunk with no embellishments. Atou was dissatisfied with the makeshift furniture, but Takuto appeared surprisingly happy with it, so she couldn't complain.

"We're going for simple anyways, so it works. Besides, they put

their hearts into it, and that's what really matters."

Takuto spoke to her the way he might a young child. He was a lower-middle-class man at his core and wasn't a fan of extravagance for its own sake.

As for Atou, she wanted to trumpet Takuto's awesomeness to the world, so his simple tastes made her a tad dissatisfied. Still, any displeasure vanished in the face of her policy that whatever Takuto wanted came first.

"That's true. Their devotion is the real deal, and you can certainly sense it from the time and materials they put into making this furniture when they lack both. We need to acknowledge its value from that angle."

"They said they'll make us something even better in the future, and I'm more than happy with what we have for now."

"All right. I understand. Everything is to be as you see fit, my king."

Handmade furniture typically costs a fortune back home, Takuto thought as he ran his hand over the table, enjoying its natural feel.

Already sitting on the table was the fast-food breakfast Takuto had produced. Normally, the Dark Elves would serve the King themselves, and they'd offered to, but Takuto turned them down. If they had the time and energy to spare waiting on him, he preferred they direct them toward building the empire's foundation first.

Plus, he wanted to enjoy whatever alone time with Atou he could get.

"That being said... King Takuto, why don't you eat something a little healthier now that you have more Mana to spare?"

Takuto chewed his hamburger like he was in heaven, sauce on his cheeks. Processed foods actually cost more Mana than healthy food, but that was his little secret.

"Because it's something I can only eat *now*. This is paradise, compared to a diet of hospital food."

"I really just want you to eat more healthily, King Takuto."

"The King of Ruin is evil, so it's only right that I eat lots of unhealthy fast food. Want some, Atou? I mean, is a salad really enough for you?"

"Yes. I find this most agreeable."

"Really? Isn't that a little too healthy for an evil Hero?"

Takuto eyed the bowl piled sky-high with a salad like it was some sort of foreign sludge. Eventually growing bored of the topic,

he redirected the conversation to whatever seemed interesting as he sucked soda up his straw.

“By the way, how are the Dark Elves doing? Is construction going okay?”

“It’s going well—so well that it’s a little worrying, my liege. My concern is some people are pushing themselves a little too hard to repay the boon you’ve granted them.”

There was something unearthly about the Dark Elves’ dedication to repaying their debt to him for saving their race. They had been adamant about it ever since they became evil beings of Mynoghra, and Takuto was concerned about it becoming a problem.

“Hey, I’m happy they’re so eager, but pushing themselves until they break is too much.”

Bodies fall apart when they are pushed past their limit.

As someone whose body had always been broken, even when he’d done nothing, Takuto couldn’t let them continue down their current path unchecked. But he couldn’t order them to take mandated breaks just for that.

“We need to build various facilities urgently too. It’s hard to order them to stop when they’re this motivated and keep producing results,” Atou reasoned.

“Maybe I should tell them to take it slow after they finish some more buildings. We should let them go at their own pace for now.”

“I think that’s a wise decision. Besides, hearing those words directly from you, their king, would be a greater reward than any jewels.”

“*Blegh*, I feel like I’m gonna be crushed under their expectations. On the bright side, the construction of housing and Food Production facilities is complete. Feels like we’ve finally finished the tutorial.”

“It *does* feel that way. All that’s left is finishing the Palace and expanding the facilities according to the King’s policy. What do you want to build next?”

“About that, I’m thinking of discussing future policies with the Dark Elves and getting *their* opinions from now on.”

Atou looked hysteric after hearing that unbelievable remark.

A civilization’s commander is absolute, and their words take precedence over all else. Accordingly, such a commander has no reason to seek what others think about managing their empire.

“You want to include *them*? I know we accepted them into our

empire as intellectuals, but isn't it better if the King's ideas take precedence, with everyone else's only given in support of yours?"

Elder Moltar and Gia already held important positions in Mynoghra. Atou thought that was good enough and that further interference from them would cause problems in overall empire management.

But Takuto, yet again, seemed to have a different opinion.

"I'll make the final decisions, of course. But I've come to realize hearing what they have to say can help me see things from another angle."

Takuto was concerned about the more intricate factors that weren't present in the game, such as human emotions, health, and day-to-day life. The game didn't cover the smaller issues like the Dark Elves overworking themselves. Obviously, these issues needed to be addressed in the real world, and if left unattended, they'd only lead to their downfall later.

These factors had made Takuto decide the Dark Elves should be more closely involved in empire management. He believed tapping into their thinking would help them identify problems he and Atou might not notice otherwise.

"Besides that, doesn't it bother you? All the work lately."

"...I've definitely noticed an increase in impersonal work."

Atou nodded. "I guess it wasn't just my imagination then."

Problems that were not portrayed in-game had come to a head. Although they distributed it to some extent, Takuto and Atou were responsible for an enormous amount of work. They were managing a budding empire after all, however imperfect it might be.

Confirming necessary information, giving instructions, inspecting each department, and every other kind of tedious managerial work kept piling up on them.

"At this rate, our civilization will become a sweatshop. We may be evil, but I want our working conditions to be healthy."

"The game never covered what a burden this much work would actually be. I can't believe I never realized the impediment it might cause..."

"The same goes for the Dark Elves, too. They'll have an easier time accepting orders after sharing their thoughts and opinions first, rather than being unilaterally ordered around. It's important to make them feel included."

"I believe it's only right for the citizens of Mynoghra to

faithfully obey the King's orders without having an opinion of their own, but...it never occurred to me to approach it your way. If that's your reasoning for it, then I can accept hearing them out before finalizing policy decisions. Your strategic thinking never ceases to amaze me, my king!"

Atou beamed and held her head high with satisfaction at comprehending the King's thought process. Smiling at her adorable reaction, Takuto immediately pointed out how this very conversation put his theory to the test.

"See, didn't talking it out help you more easily accept my decision?"

"Ack... I see. So this is what you meant."

Atou's expression fell as she realized she walked right into that one. She couldn't deny Takuto's explanation helped her more readily accept his plan. She would've still felt dissatisfied with his choice if he'd just told her to follow orders without question.

Of course, it never occurred to Atou to go against her king's orders. She would just pout a bit about him not taking her feelings into consideration. And that dissatisfaction was the very problem Takuto was trying to solve by including people in the decision-making.

Atou felt ashamed at her short-sightedness, while also being impressed by Takuto's discernment. Moreover, her loyalty grew even greater in the knowledge of how he compassionately respected his subordinates.

Breakfast was almost over before she knew it, and the time for chitchat came to an end. They'd become so absorbed in conversation it'd taken more time to finish eating than usual, but Atou was very pleased to have these private moments with Takuto.



IN a good mood after breakfast, Takuto sat on the stone dais he'd taken a liking to recently and addressed Atou, who was waiting on him.

"All right, now that breakfast is out of the way, why don't we call Elder Moltar and the others in to discuss what our surroundings are like? We've already collected most of the intel on this area, so once things settle down a bit, I plan to switch the Scouts to Patrol

Mode. I'm not interested in raiding another nation, and I want to hear what the others have to say on that too."

"Patrol Mode...to guard against any activity in the nearby human town, right? Never hurts to be cautious. Actually, I believe we should pay extra close attention to their movement, my King."

"Need to be cautious of the Holy Kingdom of Qualia, right? That's not their town outside, is it?"

"No, it's not. It seems to belong to a neutral nation located to the far east of this forest. It's a mystery why they'd build a town so far from the rest of their territory, but the real problem is the location. They'll likely be first to notice us."

The first Long-legged Bug they created had done an outstanding job scouting, despite its disturbing appearance. The Accursed Lands, whose depth and scale were unknown, had already completely dispelled the fog of war in Takuto's mind, and their reconnaissance now extended to the outer edge of the forest. What was discovered in the process was a human town.

The Dark Elves didn't know about it either, and it seemed to be a relatively new town, but its proximity was a problem. For Takuto and Atou, who prioritized stealth, this town posed the greatest risk of discovery.

"But it's a little reassuring to know there are a lot of neutral nations on this continent. We can only hope they're open to reason. That town concerns me, but I think we should leave it be for now."

"It's fortunate most of the people living in the vicinity are too afraid to come near this forest... I'll order the Long-legged Bugs to continue stealthily collecting intel."

Takuto nodded, giving his consent.

"On the other hand, if anyone dares come near this forest while we're expending this much effort to stay hidden, it'll mean they have reason to..."

"That's likely."

"Well, it doesn't seem like anyone has caught onto us yet, and it's unlikely for people to suddenly come for the Dark Elves after several months of nothing. I think we'll be fine after all!"

Takuto slapped the side of his stone throne and cheerfully sought Atou's agreement. Delighted to see her king in such high spirits, she giggled and teasingly countered his comment.

"Oh, don't say that, King Takuto! You're just asking for something bad to happen now! Don't jinx us!"

“We’re in real trouble if joking around jinxes us. You’re such a worrywart, Atou. *Ahaha...*”

The laughter died on Takuto’s lips, his cheerful expression vanishing instantly.

“...*Hm?* Is something the matter?”

“It seems I really jinxed us.”

All signs of amusement disappeared from Takuto’s face, replaced by a bone-chilling expression.

“An armed group is heading toward this forest.”

Information on the armed group came to him with urgency from a Long-legged Bug. With what he said to Atou in mind, silent anger ignited within Takuto.

If their Dark Elf subjects saw them now, they’d only be able to cower and bow their heads in fear.

They just wanted to live in peace and quiet. Conflict was the last thing they wanted.

But there wasn’t a rule in place that guaranteed someone’s safety, just because they were a pacifist.

Cloying darkness and jet-black malice rife with evil surged within them.

Mynoghra’s first encounter with the forces of good was about to begin.



Holy Kingdom of Qualia

Empire

Alignment: Holy

Selectable Commanders:

Saint of Blooming Burials

The Veiled Saint

.....

Distinct Features

《Religious》

《Militarist》

《World Power》

NO IMAGE

Description

Qualia is a religious empire that worships the Holy God Arlos. It's known for its powerful military, built upon its religion. This empire has huge combat bonuses against evil forces and bonuses for managing vast territories. They have access to strong units called Saints, on top of the military might granted by a large territory, but this comes with the risk of strained operating costs as the empire becomes too large and bloated.

Chapter 11: The Witch

THE Accursed Land Reconnaissance Team had made the long trek from the Holy Kingdom of Qualia to their destination, despite Barbarian attacks along the way.

“You can see it now—the Cursed Sea of Trees that keeps anything alive from gettin’ into the Accursed Lands. Let’s start investigating this area, since it’s the closest to Qualia.”

“That’s the start of the Accursed Lands, eh?”

A dark, menacing forest suddenly came into view just as Captain Bargo pointed it out.

According to the map Lonius had checked, the vast forest making up this part of the Accursed Lands was too large for them to investigate in a timely manner with limited manpower. But they *could* run a simple preliminary survey. Then, if they spotted anything out of the ordinary, they could come back with a bigger team.

That’s what the Paladins were dispatched for and how Lonius interpreted their mission.

It should’ve been easy enough to complete.

But something felt off...

At first glance, it looked like nothing more than a huge forest, but it gave the impression that it contained hordes of spine-chilling monsters.

Lonius stared into the fathomless depths of the forest as a creeping sensation stirred in his gut.



“HALT!”

The reconnaissance team stopped at Paladin Verdel’s command. The Cursed Sea of Trees was right before their eyes, and they were in the process of discussing when and where to begin their investigation. Everyone who’d been searching for the best entry point turned their attention toward Verdel.

Was something there?

As soon as they realized Verdel's gaze was fixed on something in the forest, the rest looked in the same direction.

Then they saw a figure quietly heading their way.

"What?"

It was a teenage girl. She had eerily white skin and wavy, ashen hair. She wore tattered linen clothes. Her crimson eyes were strikingly inhuman, which only added to the otherworldly impression she gave off, coming from the cursed forest.

Anyone living in Mynoghra would've immediately identified her as the King of Ruin Takuto Ira's confidant and the strongest Hero, Atou.

Naturally, no one here knew of her.

"What do you think she is, Lonius?"

"Likely one of the Dark Elves you conjectured would be here, Sir Verdel. I'm surprised a girl like her was able to traverse the harsh Dark Continent, but she must've been one of the lucky survivors."

"*Hmph*. Lucky survivor...my ass," Verdel cursed, eyeing her with palpable suspicion.

Verdel was in charge of this mission. Lonius and the mercenary corps decided to leave everything to him, since they didn't know what to do.

Verdel closely assessed the girl with his arms crossed. He waited until she had come closer to finally question her in a loud voice.

"You there! Girl! Who the hell are you? We've got business with this forest. What're you doing coming out of the Accursed Lands?!"

"...Oh. I see you are Paladins from Qualia. I am one of the Dark Elves who fled to this forest. What brings you all the way out here?"

Her response was normal by all accounts. Her lyrical voice was more charming than the impression her appearance gave, and that discrepancy roused further suspicion in Verdel.

"I can't answer that—it's classified. Answer my question, girl. Why did you come out of that forest?"

Verdel calmly repeated his question. His word choice was the same as usual, but his typical lazy rudeness took a backseat to the razor-sharp aura he let off now.

“...We had nowhere left to go after we were chased from our homeland. This land may be cursed, but it is the last place we can live in peace as no one comes here.”

“Deliberately choosing to live in a cursed land is creepy, to say the least... Well, not that it matters. As you said, we’re Paladins hailing from Qualia. We’ve got business with this forest. May we come in?”

“You mustn’t. Please do not set foot in this forest, Sir Paladin.”

“We are here on a mission from God, girl. I can’t approve of you refusing—”

“Hey, I’m doing the talking! Keep quiet, Lonius!”

“...Forgive me, Sir Verdel.”

Lonius gasped and jumped at Verdel’s stern rebuke.

I am indeed guilty of interrupting their conversation, but did he really need to reprimand me that harshly?

Lonius decided to watch how things played out between the two, while secretly vowing to report the other man’s every unholy act in detail to Central later.

The girl glanced at Lonius, then the mercenaries. Crimson eyes scanned their faces with an eldritch gaze.

Was she really a Dark Elf?

She remained silent as everyone under her gaze doubted her race. After a long pause with Lonius saying nothing, the girl returned her gaze to Verdel and continued the conversation dispassionately.

“You will frighten the other Dark Elves who escaped with me. We’ve only recently gained a place to rest in peace after a long and painful journey. Please, I beg you to grant us this mercy...”

“We’ve got a job to do. I’d love to turn around and leave, but I can’t without orders from above...”

“I ask that you please make an exception and refrain from entering this forest.”

The girl was polite and paid them every courtesy. If you turned a blind eye to the various oddities, her entreaty was normal enough.

But every foot of this cursed forest belonged to the Accursed Lands, and the girl in front of them clearly didn’t belong there. It wouldn’t be wrong to assume something was hidden where she refused to let them go.

Something to do with the apocalypse-bringer Saint Soalina prophesized about.

“What’s in that forest?”

“Nothing but peace and quiet. Nothing here is a threat to you. Why are you so obsessed with this tiny, gloomy forest?”

“*Tch!* We’ve received a prophecy that an apocalypse-bringer will come from here. We can’t just go home empty-handed...”

“S-Sir Verdel! This is a top-secret mission! Why did you tell this Dark Elf of the prophecy?!”

“Shut up! I told you to stay bloody quiet, Lonius! Sometimes you just have to divulge a secret!”

Lonius held his tongue after being yelled at yet again.

Verdel had just disclosed one of the kingdom’s confidential secrets to an unauthorized individual. And not just any individual, but a Dark Elf suspected of starting an evil cult.

That was a crime worthy of being tried for treason under normal circumstances, and yet he’d divulged that information in hopes of breaking the negotiation deadlock.

In fact, surprise showed for the first time on the girl’s cold features, and she held her hand to her mouth.

“A prophecy...you say? You’re concerned about that potential apocalypse-bringer coming from here, yes? Please rest assured no one in this land wishes your people any harm, Sir Paladin.”

“How can you prove that to me?”

“I’m afraid you will have to take my word for it.”

“Can you let us into the forest? Just a bit? That’ll convince us.”

“Please stay out here.”

“Is there a chance this apocalypse-bringer will bring disaster to our kingdom or its people?”

“None whatsoever. Rather, it’s *we* who are afraid of you.”

“You’re a smooth talker for a kid. You’re used to negotiating and sound awfully confident.”

“I repeat: we wish you no harm.”

They were going in circles.

She entreated them to leave for the sake of peace without revealing her identity. Everyone present already figured out she was no ordinary Dark Elf girl. No. They’d realized she wasn’t *even* a Dark Elf.

The more they talked, the more uneasy they felt about her. And they couldn’t ignore the ominous evil presence in the air.

They had no way of knowing why this girl, who exuded the aura of a devil in the flesh, refused them entry. She obviously

wasn't going to tell them either.

So Verdel decided to ask the final question that'd put an end to this unholy encounter.

"Do you swear to God?"

"I swear to...*our* God."

The nonhuman girl swore to God.

Verdel had no way of knowing if that was to the God he believed in or to a different entity altogether, but after a moment of silence, he opened his eyes and gave the order.

"We're going home."

"Wha—?!"

Lonius whipped his head toward Verdel—that was the last thing he expected to hear.

They were obviously dealing with an evil being. It was hard to imagine a Paladin—especially a High Paladin—would consider retreating from God's enemy.

How was this any different from succumbing to evil and retreating like a coward?

Even Lonius, who had a reputation for being pious and level-headed, couldn't keep his temper in check.

"What in blazes are you thinking, Sir Verdel?! That thing is shrouded in a terrifying aura! How can a Paladin such as yourself not sense the evil from it?!"

"Nothin' evil here. I'm goin' home. I accept her desire to live in peace. That's the end of it. Damn, I'm sleepy. *And* hungry."

Verdel seemed to have already made up his mind as he lazily stretched to loosen his back with the same languid demeanor he'd had before reaching the forest. Obviously, Lonius and the baffled mercenaries weren't convinced.

"Are you letting an evil monster roam free?!" Lonius cried, not letting it drop.

"There's no evil monster. Our investigation has concluded—there's nothing here."

"What if it's pulling the wool over our eyes?! How will you take responsibility if they bring calamity to our kingdom?!"

"Don't let fear cloud your judgment, Lonius. Our doctrine starts with having faith. Reread the scriptures, you pessimist."

Lonius couldn't persuade him. Verdel stood firm in his decision. Lonius had had the displeasure of getting to know his personality during this mission, and he realized he couldn't change

his mind with words alone. So, he whipped out the secret weapon he had kept up his sleeve just in case.

“...You have been accused of kidnapping an innocent girl and fornicating with her. Perhaps that evil girl corrupted you?”

Creases formed in Verdel's brow, instantly revealing his anger.

“Are you serious? What kind of a bloody idiot are you? That's clearly a baseless rumor with no evidence. And why bring it up *now*, of all times? Don't make wild accusations just to make things go your way! I'll pound you into the ground if you keep this shit up!”

Verdel was suspected of committing a crime. Convinced he was guilty by his unholy conduct, crass remarks, and most of all, by how he cowered before evil, Lonius let his own sense of justice guide him to pass judgment on the other man.

“High Paladin Verdel, I regrettably must remove you from this mission for having abandoned your duties. I, Paladin Lonius, shall assume command of the investigation.”

“Huh? Quit screwin' around! Is this *really* the place to lecture someone about gossip and politics? Is this seriously the time to be preachin' about your iron sense of justice? Are you *truly* incapable of making the simple decision of what you should and shouldn't be doing right now? Don't make a fatal mistake!”

Panic showed on Verdel's face for the first time. His aloof gruffness and air of confidence had been replaced by genuine edginess over the present danger. That change in his attitude only fueled Lonius's poor judgment.

“Paladin Lonius, please don't be so hasty. Conflict produces nothing. We can use our words. Please heed the advice of your superior.”

Even the girl watching the power struggle joined Verdel in telling Lonius to stop, adding more fuel to the fire. It was more than enough to ignite the Paladin's wrath and self-righteousness.

“Silence, evil wench!”

Lonius drew his sword and pointed it at her.

The atmosphere instantly became toxic.

The fallout between Verdel and Lonius became real, and the problem that was about to end exploded.

“Hey! Bargo! Mercenaries! Help me stop him!”

“I'm really sorry 'bout this, Pal Verdel. We were hired by Pal Lonius, you see. We can't obey your orders, even *if* you're higher-

ranked.”

“Dammit!”

Verdel was paying the price for leaving the hiring of the mercenaries to Lonius. Feeling wise, Bargo probably felt even stronger about wanting to leave than Verdel.

But mercenaries valued client trust over everything else. Going against their employer would put an end to future work. So Bargo couldn't follow Verdel's orders.

There was no one left who agreed with him. Well, the girl did, but there wasn't much she could do when she was the source of their discord.

“We will deal with Paladin Verdel later. You come first, wench. You're going to tell us every last detail about that ominous aura of yours and why you came out of this cursed forest! We are going to interrogate you back at the capital so you can repent before God! Men! Seize that wolf in sheep's clothing!”

The girl quietly shook her head, expressing her refusal with a sad expression. Her wishes weren't respected by Lonius. He had no intention of listening to what she had to say.

Captain Bargo looked to Lonius for confirmation to go ahead. His men had their swords drawn and were in position to attack. They may have been staring at what looked like a teenage girl, but it was clear from her aura that she wasn't human.

Resistance would lead to a fight.

Fifty mercenaries against a single girl.

They overwhelmingly had the upper hand. But they were up against an evil being—there was no telling what would happen.

“Go ahead. Do it! Get rough if she resists. Watch yourselves!”

“Hey! STOP! Don't attack someone who isn't resisting!” Verdel thundered.

But there was no one left to follow the man who'd been deprived of his authority by Lonius, and his plea echoed fruitlessly.

The mercenaries surrounded the girl and slowly closed in around her.

And then...

“*Haah...* Negotiations are a bust, then?” The girl let out a sigh.

“*Tch!* Damn it!!!”

“What?!”

Lonius couldn't comprehend what just happened. He felt something hard hit him and his vision rolled backward. Only when

he saw nothing but the blue sky did he realize he'd been knocked down.

"Lonius! You alive?!"

"Y-Yes...but what was that?"

"You're seriously asking?! You're the one who said it first! It's that evil being you aggravated! You can tell just by freakin' looking at it, you fool! On your feet, now!"

Lonius finally saw the sinister tentacle swishing in the air above him. It was a strange limb with a slippery-smooth surface, ending in a spearlike point.

A single slice marred the skin of one of the tentacles whipping through the air at explosive speed.

Purple ooze dripped from the tip of Verdel's drawn sword. Verdel had deflected the attack Lonius never even detected. Realizing he'd been saved from instant death, Lonius quickly rose to his feet.

"Everything was going so perfectly too. But life never goes the way we want it to, does it?"

The girl looked at the ground, let out another annoyed sigh, then turned her head with catlike ease to glare at them.

"Hey! Mercenaries! I don't care who does it! Someone bring this news back home! It's a Witch! A Witch is here!"

"S-Sorry, Pal Verdel... She got our runners."

Bargo's pitiful voice came from behind them.

Verdel looked over his shoulder and saw the messenger pierced straight through, alongside his horse, by a tentacle that'd erupted from the ground below them. The unnamed mercenary violently convulsed and coughed up blood then fell to the ground with a hard thud as the tentacle ripped out of him and retracted underground.

On closer inspection, the wagon horses had suffered the same fate.

The reconnaissance team had brought only the bare minimum number of horses necessary for the trek as they didn't want to deal with the large amounts of water and fodder they required. All of their horses had been wiped out, leaving going on foot as the only option to bring the news back home.

And Verdel doubted the girl would let them flee now. In fact, the tentacles that'd taken out the horses were swaying behind her, as if looking for their next prey.

“Shit! She’s got damn near perfect accuracy!”

“Come and play, boys,” the girl taunted them in her lyrical voice. “I’m the monster you were looking for. The embodiment of pure evil, you know? The dark being your god hates and you hoped to find is right here.”

“S-Sir V-Verdel...”

“Don’t wuss out on me, Lonius. We can’t get out of this now... Get in position! Don’t let your guard down for a second! Fight for your damn life!”

Verdel’s motivating speech sparked the will to fight in everyone alive. They understood that if they didn’t fight for their lives, they wouldn’t live to see tomorrow, and they prepared themselves to go all out.

“Oh, I see you are going to face me, holy men. How can a fool who made an irreparable choice with his unnecessary snooping and warped sense of justice confront this calamity?”

Her linen outfit began to melt off like sap. Sludge bubbled up around her as stagnant malice spilled off her body until it eventually formed a new outfit.

A jet-black dress seeped in darkness itself wrapped around her. Twisted accessories that defied logic. Mousy white hair and nauseating eyes that seemed to personify hell itself. Several more tentacles grew from her back and swayed like snakes ascertaining their prey.



Her crimson eyes locked on them and she sneered.

“...Now *pray*.”

“O Lord, our maker! Grant me the strength to stand against evil!”

Verdel and Lonius called their God’s miraculous powers into themselves at the same time. The mercenaries nocked arrows into their bows and took aim at her.

A lurid smile lit up the girl’s face as she took a step forward.

Sludge Atou, Mynoghra’s Hero.

With the King of Ruin’s complete trust, she was about to let loose in this world for the first time.

The falling out that came from their sudden encounter and the transition to battle—everything from beginning to end was unexpected and unwanted.

Verdel fixed his gaze on the girl—no, the *Witch*—who slowly approached as he inwardly cursed the angels of fate, who seemed to hate him.

“Damn it all to hell! Things were goin’ so well too! This sucks!”

“I completely agree with you. This isn’t what *I* wanted eith—”

“Fire!”

The archers loosed their arrows per Verdel’s order without waiting for the Witch to finish speaking. Over thirty arrows released from bows squeezed with the full strength of their archers flew at the girl.

The tentacles growing from her back smacked every single one out of the air. A delighted smile blossomed on her young face as she reacted to their attack with inhuman speed.

“...*Heh*, how merciless of you. I really like people like you. I love them to *death*.”

“Dammit! She parried the arrows like they’re nothing!”

“S-Sir Verdel... What in the world is a Witch? Are you saying this girl is one?!”

Attacking with arrows was a waste of time. They didn’t even distract her, much less hurt her.

Verdel turned his gaze to the flustered Under Paladin, knowing in his gut that normal methods wouldn’t work against this opponent. Maybe Lonius drew the wrong conclusion that Witches were just some sort of evil cult or violent Mabeasts from his

conversation with Bargo. Or maybe he categorized them as something still Human.

I should've shared more about my concerns and the secrets I was strictly ordered to keep about the crisis Qualia's in. Regretting his choice, Verdel briefly explained about Witches, even though it was too late to be much good now.

“Witches are apocalypse-bringing monsters prophesied by the Saints and acknowledged by the bigwigs. Currently, only two have been confirmed. She’s likely the third! Even *you* should understand how deadly they are if I told you the Northern Disturbance was caused by a single Witch, right?!”

“I-Impossible...”

“.....”

Witch—that title described precisely how dangerous the girl was.

The mayhem in the Northern Province had yet to show signs of ceasing—and a single Witch was said to be its cause.

Lonius never expected the world crisis Qualia desperately hid would appear in front of him.

The girl watched them with her ghastly eyes, her tentacles swaying like snakes ready to strike. It was as if she were waiting for them to come at her so she could play with them.

Running wasn’t an option.

Even a High Paladin like Verdel could barely counter her attack and the Witch had set her sights on Lonius for that one. Turning their backs to run was an instant death sentence. That much was certain.

“Let’s attack her together! Mercenaries, she’s too much for you to handle! Switch to support!” Verdel howled, and Lonius drew his sword.

Both Paladins had experience subduing Mabeasts. They undisputedly had the skills to fight against nonhuman threats. They felt no fear, because of the blessings granted by the Holy Sword Artes only Paladins could use. All they had to do was crush their opponent, with their body and soul on the line.

“You’re with me, Lonius! URAAAAAAAAAH!!”

A loud explosive pop went off under Verdel’s feet as he launched into a thunderous sprint. Lonius dashed after him.

The battle with the Apocalypse Witch commenced.

...The mercenaries couldn’t see what happened. The fight

unfolded at a speed their eyes were incapable of following. They could only see the moment Lonius lunged at the girl, but even that occurred at a logic-defying pace.

Once someone reached the rank of High Paladin, they boasted monstrous strength, said to equal a Lesser Dragon. And when they combined forces with an Under Paladin like Lonius, it could be described as having the strength of a natural disaster.

Yet, for all that, they were up against an anomaly beyond them.

“So slow...and *weak*.”

Even after being on the receiving end of the Paladins’ most powerful attack, she looked unfazed. Their swords had been deflected by the girl’s tentacles, which had switched to defense mode.

Her defenses surpassed the speed of a High Paladin’s attacks, proving their combined strength was still no match for the Witch. Or so it seemed at first—

“No, we might still stand a chance!”

“...*Mm?*”

A tentacle rolled onto the ground, spraying purple blood everywhere. The two Paladins jumped away in a single leap, retreating to avoid being bathed in its blood.

The girl they called a Witch stared at the flailing tentacle, which seemed to be a separate living creature, and then she brought its remains in front of her face to inspect. She frowned, like this presented a concern as mild as not having the right ingredients for lunch.

“I assume that technique uses a god’s blessing to deliver a divine strike, right? It gives you special attack and defense buffs against evil civilizations. This is why I always say good civilizations get unfair advantages.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about! But I’m not gonna miss this chance!”

Verdel broke into another thunderous sprint and slashed at her again.

Two shadows moved in unison. Their timing was perfectly synced.

Blood sprayed everywhere yet again.

“Fascinating. You can sever them?”

A second tentacle fell, and still the Paladins kept up their

onslaught. Verdel slipped in under the blood spray with beastlike agility to attack from below.

The Witch tried to pierce him with two of her four remaining tentacles.

But her attack that should've brought certain death was easily countered by his unique Sword Arte.

The tentacles lost their speed advantage in close combat. The girl became frustrated by the sword and the blessing imbuing each and every swing with holiness.

"How about this then—*Tch!*"

A shadow fell over the girl. Instantly realizing she was being attacked from above, she sent her tentacles up without even checking what was there.

The impact and bloody pop came a second later.

Only three tentacles remained. This time, the girl jumped back to gain space.

"Now! Fire!"

"I slightly underestimated you Paladins. You put up a tough fight."

The girl moved her tentacles faster to knock down the arrows, since she had less to use now.

Contrary to their arguments on the way there, the two Paladins fought in perfect unison. Verdel, with his superior strength, dealt relentless strikes, and Lonius slipped in to attack where she was weakest.

The mercenaries stuck to long-range attacks, careful not to get in their way. Everyone believed victory was theirs if they could just destroy her remaining tentacles.

But they were up against an apocalypse-bringer—the very embodiment of bottomless evil.

"Then how about we play it *this* way?"

"Wha?!"

Seeing they had her at a disadvantage, the Witch changed her tactics and extended her tentacles to the left and right. It was too late by the time Verdel tried to warn the others.

"GUAGH!"

As soon as he heard those guttural groans, the tentacles had coiled around two mercenaries and raised them above the Witch.

"I just *love* Humans. They are weak, fragile, and make for the perfect shield because they care so *much* for each other."

“...elp...ee...”

“Shh, hush now,” the girl giggled.

“GUAAAGHHH!”

The tentacle tips stabbed through their throats. The captured mercenaries shook with the shock, but didn't seem to be dead.

It was a clichéd yet effective tactic.

One so wicked the Paladins never saw it coming.

Anger oozed in uncontrollable red splotches on Verdel's face. His enemy was resorting to despicable means. *Don't let your emotions control you!* he thought, restraining himself.

She was provoking them. Being blinded by rage would steal their chance at victory.

They shouldn't expect Human ethics from an evil being. They were up against something far beyond their understanding. Case in point, the Witch was swinging the suffering mercenaries over their heads with the glee of a cat playing with a toy.

“You fiend!”

“Lonius! Don't be rash! Control your anger! We've worn our enemy down to the point she had to take hostages! Let's tackle her together!”

“*Oooh!* You're coming anyways? What about my meat shields? Going to kill them? A wise decision. Mercenaries have little value, after all.”

The two mercenary shields immediately died in a splatter of blood. But perhaps, Verdel should be applauded for not faltering in this situation. In fact, their attack not only took out another tentacle, but dealt a blow to her main body as if to make up for killing the hostages.

“Two left... If we chop off just two more of those damn nasty suckers, we win!”

“I'm with you, Sir Verdel.”

They'd seen through the Witch's tactics. The end of this fight was right around the corner, and it was about time for the forces of good to lay evil to rest.

A single red slice marred the beautiful white cheek that shouldn't have belonged to something so evil.

The Apocalypse Witch could be *killed*.

Knowing that gave them a sliver of hope for victory.

“Here we go! Stay on guard!”

The end was nigh. Everything was about to be over.

“I forgot to mention...”

Curiously, the Witch clapped her hands together as if she'd just remembered something. Then, with a carefree smile reminiscent of an angelic little girl, she skewered Verdel in a shower of tentacles, just before his sword could stave in her skull.

“...That simply put, I have the strength of an entire army. In terms of regular soldiers, you need about 5,000 to even put up a decent fight against me. Oh, and I have an endless supply of *these*.”

Countless tentacles sprouted from her back.

She'd been toying with them from the start.

Verdel regretted how naïve he was for thinking they could win. Realizing his life was at its end via the handful of tentacles jutting from his stomach, he grabbed one of the feelers in his final moments of struggle and vomited blood.

“R-Run, Lonius...”

“S-Sir Verdel...”

“RUNNNNNNN!”

The girl cocked her head to one side, then impaled his skull.

The High Paladin convulsed once, then fell silent.



The body that fell to the ground with a thud was already an empty husk, emphasizing that his life had been lost for good.

“Okay. It’s your turn now, Paladin Lonius. I killed him right away, but regrettably, you won’t get the same treatment.”

Innumerable tentacles swished around her, as if to plunge him into the despairing knowledge he was next to die. He had no way to win now.

With Verdel gone, Lonius couldn’t even cut those tentacles. Despair began to spread through the mercenaries too. They were sure to be next after Lonius was killed.

One of the men who understood that let out a deranged scream.

“UWAAAAH! AAAGGGHHH!”

The terrified mercenary threw his bow down and ran for it—only to be effortlessly killed by a tentacle that burst out of the ground. The girl sent a cursory glance his way before returning her attention to Lonius.

Running meant death. Everyone lost hope.

Only Lonius thought her actions strange. Why did she let her focus turn to people who fled? Now that he thought about it, she’d targeted the runners and horses first.

Several small thoughts started coalescing. The moment he found the answer, Lonius shouted at the top of his lungs.

“Spread out in every direction! Someone survive and bring this news back home!”

“You just *had* to figure it out... Oh well.”

The Witch was clearly panicked, informing Lonius his guess was right.

The girl swung down her arm as if sending some kind of signal, and dozens of tentacles pursued the bolters, as he’d feared.

THUD-THUD-KERTHUD!

Tentacles thrust into the ground with the same sharpness and power of an iron spear.

Death cries rose from every direction as the mercenaries ran and got skewered.

Lonius now bet everything on this one moment.

“O Lord our maker! Grant me the strength to stand against evil!”

He brought God’s power into himself once more and made

another last-ditch run at the Witch.

The girl was so preoccupied finishing off the mercenaries, her guard was down. Lonius managed to deflect the flurry of tentacles that came to intercept him and dove close to her.

It all happened in a heartbeat and the God of victory was on his side.

The remaining tentacles couldn't intercept him in time.

Determined to end it with this single strike and avenge Verdel, Lonius swung his blade.

CLANG!

Metal clashed with metal.

Trembling, Lonius readjusted his grip on the sword he nearly dropped.

"H-How?!"

"You got the drop on me. My compliments."

"How the *hell* did you—"

"...Did I use a Paladin's sword blessed by god, you ask?"

The Apocalypse Witch had all her tentacles preoccupied and the enemy close enough to fell her—but she'd picked up Verdel's sword and parried Lonius's attack.

Evil beings *couldn't* use Paladin weapons blessed by God. That was an unchanging fact believed by all in the Holy Kingdom of Qualia.

But Verdel's Paladin sword sat comfortably in the girl's hand, as if mocking his people's beliefs.

Cackling like she enjoyed every moment, the Witch spun the sword in a circle and entered a fighting stance. Her every move perfectly mimicked Paladin Verdel's.

"I took it for myself—that fallen Paladin's Artes. When I killed him, the techniques he honed through tireless practice and training became *mine*."

Impossible! Lonius was consumed by that thought. Stealing your opponent's abilities was absurd in and of itself, but to even rob them of their Holy Artes?

An evil being was imitating and exploiting their skills. What in the world was just if the power of their one and only God could be so easily defiled?

Lonius could only tremble. He realized the more this Witch killed them, the greater her power became.

"Paladin Verdel was a mighty warrior worthy of being an elite

unit. Perhaps he was destined to do great things. Too bad he died due to your imprudence.”

Lonius heard the death cries of the mercenaries who failed to escape in time. It was obvious why she left him standing there in a daze while she took care of them.

She was defiling his pride—spreading mud on all his honor as a Paladin.

“His thoughts came to me alongside his Holy Sword Artes. ‘What will happen to Lonius if I die here? What’ll happen to his family? His wife Marsha? His daughter Mina? Some of the mercenaries have families too. What will happen to them? I can’t die. I definitely can’t die! Not when there are people waiting for me to come home too!’ He was a very valiant and noble man, wasn’t he?”

“Lies! How can you know that?!” Lonius howled, losing all calm.

Those were definitely the names of his beloved wife and daughter. He’d only mentioned them to Verdel once. Just how noble and caring of a man was Verdel? Verdel, who he’d secretly mocked for being too gruff and crude to be a Paladin?

Lonius screamed, half in tears, as he lamented how that valiant man’s soul, memories, and noble pride had been robbed and played with by the wicked being smirking in front of him.

“What’re you thinking right now? What can you possibly be thinking about the man who had the talent, heart, and nobility to be a High Paladin, when you’re so puny and worthless in comparison?”

“Th-The mercenaries who escaped will inform our kingdom of this and bring back the holy forces that will obliterate you... His will shall not perish here!”

Lonius’s strategy had half-succeeded. The Witch’s tentacles went after the more than thirty mercenaries who fled in every direction, but they couldn’t kill them all. He didn’t know how many had made it out alive, but some had definitely escaped her reach.

He was convinced they would bring back news of this nightmare.

“Ahh, you mean them? Hey, everyone! How’re things on your end?”

“...Huh?”

Her overly cheerful voice caused Lonius’s jaw to drop as he

sensed he was being surrounded. Over twenty sharp gazes burrowed into him.

Silver hair and distinctly pointed, long ears.

Lonius knew exactly who was watching him with unbridled hatred and rancor.

“D-Dark Elves...” he muttered, dumbfounded.

Atou tilted her head, finding his shock curious. “Oh dear. Did I ever say I was alone? I didn’t, did I?” The cackling girl’s sadistic eyes took pleasure in the Paladin’s shattered morale. “Ah, right! I’m so sorry, I forgot to introduce you to my friends. Meet the peace-loving Dark Elves.”

A man who looked to be the strongest among the Dark Elves tossed something at Lonius’s feet—something that rolled in front of his boot.

“Bargo...”

The moment his eyes fell on that decapitated head, Lonius realized his strategy had completely failed. The Dark Elf warrior walked over to the girl, kneeled, and quietly spoke to her, as if showing the ultimate respect and decorum reserved for an overwhelmingly powerful being.

“We annihilated every single one, ma’am.”

“Thank you. Good work.”

What relationship did this girl—this Witch—have with the Dark Elves? Did the Dark Elves create a new evil cult and summon the Witch with some sort of wicked ritual as Verdel feared?

With no way to confirm the truth, the fatal mistake he’d made and its consequences sank Lonius into an abyss of total hopelessness. Verdel, who’d strongly advised him to not be hasty, had died, and the mercenaries he’d entrusted with this news were wiped out.

And now the end had come for him too.

Realizing that all hope was lost, Lonius gripped his sword with quivering hands.

“I apologize for making you wait. Now have at me. I shall fend you off with the sword belonging to the man you disparaged and dismissed.”

The way she spun the sword in a circle was undoubtedly Verdel’s technique.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

Sludge Atou gained the following abilities by defeating a unit:

《Holy Sword Arte》

- Blessed swords can be equipped
- Obtain the following abilities when equipped with a sword:

1.2x attack bonus against evil units

1.2x defense bonus against evil units

OK



“...**LET’S** talk about a possible future.”

The setting sun set the world ablaze, signaling the battle’s end in a red hue. The victor was decided, no miracle had occurred, and the obvious ending had come for Under Paladin Lonius.

“What would’ve been possible if you’d only listened to poor Paladin Verdel, who lies dead at your feet.”

Atou hung the fatally injured Paladin Lonius upside down with several of her tentacles and offered him these final words. He no longer had strength to resist.

Knocked around by Verdel’s Sword Artes within an inch of his life, he’d literally had the will to fight beaten from him and lost all motivation to struggle.

Atou spoke to him quietly. Despite her duty to kill him immediately, the words poured forth, as if this was a point she needed to drill home before offing him.

“If only you’d accepted, even grudgingly, you’d have returned home without incident. You would give your report as usual—well, your assessment wouldn’t have been great, but you still would’ve been on your way back to your loving family in one piece.

“Your beloved wife and daughter would’ve welcomed you home with open arms. A warm hearth and the smell of stew waiting for you. You would hug them, whisper how much you love and missed them, and offer up thanks to your god for safely finishing your mission and protecting this tranquility.

“...Meanwhile, I would’ve gotten my own taste of tranquility. I would be relieved you people actually knew how to negotiate, and I’d fall asleep wishing this peace and quiet lasted forever.”

She spoke gently, but her words contained palpable hatred. Silent rage blamed him for not listening, for letting his shortsighted pride run wild.

“Now, let us talk about the future you chose.”

Lonius was at death’s door. Hemorrhaging from his countless slashes caused his consciousness to fade in and out as he wheezed for air through his lips, his eyes barely open. His soul hadn’t departed yet.

“You will soon die. You will suffer miserably then die, leaving

only failure in your wake. Since I know your family's names, I should kill them next. I will make Marsha and Mina suffer more than you can *possibly* imagine before slaughtering them. Oh, your daughter's still just a wee baby, isn't she? Then...I ought to eat her like the monster I am.

"I'm not fond of Human flesh, but you needn't worry about me wasting her. I'll make do by rolling her in a vat of spices, then either grill her little body or boil it."

Atou stared closely at Lonius's face as she eloquently painted his family's fate. She gradually embellished her words, sounding more thrilled by the second, like she genuinely enjoyed the agony, regret, and despair twisting his features.

Atou enjoyed everything about this situation.

"I won't stop there either. Your squad stayed at several Qualian villages on the border connecting the Lawful Continent to the Dark Continent, right? I've no reason or point in doing so, but I might as well kill everyone and raze the villages to the ground when I find them too. Oh, and rejoice! Because if I happen to find anyone with the same name as your daughter or wife, I'll make them suffer a thousand times more."

Lonius shook his head feebly. He squeezed out the last vestige of life in him to protest and beg for mercy.

"I was taught by someone dear to me to always kill the enemy because the moment you go soft on them, it seals your eventual doom. So, I will *kill* them. I will kill a few dozen, hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands if that's what it takes. I feel sorry for them and really didn't want it to come to this, but I will still kill. All because of *your* choice."

"D-Don't... I beg of you, please don't!"

She purposely ignored his strangled plea. Just as he'd ignored her desire for peace, she let his entreaty fall on deaf ears as well.

"You were probably a good person. You prayed, devoted yourself to your nation and loved your fellow citizens and your family. What a class act. This is why I *despise* people who blindly believe justice is always right."

Atou was finally satisfied after imparting those final words that would haunt his very soul. Or perhaps, it was more accurate to say she grew tired of playing with him. But, whatever she thought, it wouldn't change the fact that the life of the man who lived as Paladin Lonius would end here.

"I bid thee farewell, Paladin Lonius. A good and kind man such as yourself will surely go to heaven by God's grace. Please enjoy watching the brutal deaths of your loved ones from your special seat in heaven. Hahaha...*ahahahaha!*"

The Witch shook with laughter as if hating everything, as if cursing everything with that sound.

Lonius went insane with regret over the irrevocable mistake he made, with the absolute assurance he'd seen through to how wicked of a being this was, and most of all, with absolute and utter despair over the fate awaiting those he loved.

"AaaaAAAGGGGGGAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!"

"HaHAha! AHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

And thus, the entire Accursed Land Reconnaissance Team perished on the Dark Continent, due to an unforeseen calamity brought upon them by one man's sense of justice and shortsighted pride.

Only silence and the Apocalypse Hero remained.

A refreshing breeze blew, rustling Atou's hair.

For a while, she looked at Paladin Verdel's corpse, as if mourning his loss.



"MAGNIFICENT work, Lady Atou... Please leave the cleanup to us," one of the Dark Elves said.

Realizing the speaker was Warrior Captain Gia, who'd finished off the mercenaries, Atou responded without looking his way.

"I don't want us to waste time on the dead. I'll help, so let's tidy this up quickly."

There were over fifty corpses. Leaving them might expose the fact a battle had taken place there. They also needed to collect the corpses of the mercenaries slain where they'd managed to escape.

While there was nothing they could do about the blood that had absorbed into the ground, they could at least avoid the danger of the decaying flesh summoning Mabeasts and wild animals to the area.

Remaining hidden was crucial, and being able to strip the bodies of equipment would prove to be a valuable asset to their empire, which was still scarce on supplies. Therefore, corpse

disposal proved essential.

Atou summoned forth her tentacles and dexterously collected all the corpses she could see into one location. Gia instructed the Warriors, and the Dark Elves efficiently split up to recover the other bodies.

He spoke to Atou as he watched the Warrior teams run in every direction to fulfill their orders.

“That wasn’t the result we wanted, was it, Lady Atou?”

“Sadly, no. They came to investigate some anomaly occurring in this forest. There’s a good chance they’ve caught onto us.”

“No! H-How...?”

“I thought things would work out because the Paladin named Verdel was a reasonable man...”

“It’s true we aren’t trying to stir up trouble with the other nations. I also expected better results given how far away our territory is from theirs...”

“Well, just goes to show we can never see eye to eye with the forces of good when it comes down to it.”

Atou had started their initial interaction disguised as one of the fugitive Dark Elf girls. They went with that tactic to avoid leaking Mynoghra’s existence and to see what the other side’s objective was.

Takuto’s plan was to feel them out through negotiations and if they willingly left, he’d let them go. But, if they didn’t, then prioritizing stealth came first—with their lives as the price.

This was the result of opening that can of worms. Maybe there was a better way, but considering what they came for, it likely would’ve resulted in their deaths anyway.

The fact of the matter was that risking exposure wasn’t an option for Mynoghra at this point in the game. Thus, this outcome was inevitable.

Realizing they weren’t out of the woods yet, Gia instructed the Warriors closest to them to expedite their work. Then he glanced at Atou and came right out and asked about what was troubling him.

“Lady Atou, about the threat you made...do you plan to actually go through with it?”

“What threat? Oh! You mean the threat against his wife and daughter? Of course I’m not going to do that.”

Gia was flabbergasted by her admission. He’d hidden in the woods quietly listening in to Atou’s negotiations with the armed

men.

Mynoghra's King Takuto had strictly ordered them not to move until Atou gave the word, so the Dark Elves didn't join in the fight until they received the signal to eliminate the fleeing mercenaries.

So Gia had watched the whole scene unfold, and Atou's comments had chilled even his evil heart. Her threat was just a bluff? And her attitude seemed to imply, "Why did you take my joke at face value?" Gia passed the point of exasperation and went straight to being dumbfounded.

"I simply said mean things because I wanted to see what kind of expression that Paladin would make. I'm a *pacifist* who adores peace. I could never commit such atrocities..."

Gia couldn't help but feel chilled to the bone by the girl's bell-like laughter. Although he was frightened by her during their first encounter, he felt some humanity from her during their interactions. She had a slight airheaded side and became depressed whenever the King scolded her, making her seem like a real teenager.

Gia suddenly and strongly recognized his impression of Atou was absolutely wrong and that the being in front of him was evil taken to a whole other dimension.

That being said, it didn't make him sympathize with the slain Paladins. If Atou hadn't killed them, it would have been the Dark Elves who lay dead this day.

The Holy Kingdom of Qualia's interrogations were brutal and rumored to show evil no mercy. It didn't take a genius to know what actions those who worshipped law and order would take if they learned of Mynoghra's existence.

Letting down their guard to show pity to the enemy the moment they'd finally obtained a peaceful life was the height of absurdity.

Gia hadn't forgotten the merciless way they had treated his clan. He could determine who came first between his beloved clansmen and strangers without ever needing to put their lives on the scale.

"Okay, enough chitchat! Let's finish this up fast. I have much to directly report to His Majesty."

"*Hm?* Is something troubling you?"

Gia was baffled by Atou's urgency when the present danger had passed. He didn't see anything immediately worrying, but it

seemed things were heading in an unexpected direction without his knowledge.

“Yes, I was able to pilfer some information when I defeated the enemy. Things are heading in a bad direction.”

Paladin Verdel’s dying wishes flowed into Atou when she killed him. The majority was useless information concerning his comrades, but the Northern Province Disturbance was enough to pique her interest.

The beings called Witches especially drew her attention.

Continent destroying power on par with the Saints who belonged to the Holy Kingdom of Qualia and the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals.

They had fortunately yet to run into any of them, but if Atou’s hunch was right, then these Witches possessed Hero unit strength.

Mynoghra still lacked national power and military might. And the power of Hero units, their only advantage, would be less effective if their opponent had the same or superior levels of strength.

They needed to come up with countermeasures and future policies quick.

Gia also sensed the impending danger from Atou and silently nodded. Her concerns were national ones, which in turn threatened the well-being of all the citizens.

He signaled the Warriors with his hand to move faster and joined in the corpse disposal himself.

The world was about to change forever.

Chapter 12: When the Seeds of Apocalypse are Sown

“**WITCHES**, huh? They never came up in *Eternal Nations*.”

“No, they didn’t, King Takuto. This encounter reaffirms my belief that this *isn’t* the world of *Eternal Nations*. Parts of the game system may have carried over, but we should view the mechanics as being completely different.”

Takuto and Atou had gathered lots of information since arriving in this new world. From it, they drew the conclusion this world was different from *Eternal Nations*. They based their conclusion on what they’d learned about the surrounding empires.

Neither the Holy Kingdom of Qualia nor the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals existed in *Eternal Nations*. Additionally, both empires became powerful with the help of units called Saints. This was news to Takuto and Atou.

One night, they caught hold of the legend-loving Emle and listened to all sorts of stories from morning until night. Every legend and folktale, including the stories about the Saints, differed from what they knew about *Eternal Nations*, shocking them both.

Various other factors also proved this world ran by separate rules.

Makes me think of all the isekai stories I’ve read... Takuto recalled the fantasy genre that’d spiked in popularity during his last lifetime.

“Your opinion didn’t change even after you parsed the memories you took from that Paladin, right?”

“Yes. I could only see the parts he felt strongly about before death, but I was able to grasp a certain extent of it. It seems the two empires lived in relative peace without engaging in any large-scale conflicts until recently. I couldn’t confirm the existence of any strong commanders, but if I was to grade them in terms of player levels, both would be absolute noobs.”

“The Northern Disturbance is the real concern, right?”

Atou had the unique skill of claiming a defeated unit’s abilities

as her own. This also gave her the ability to view what her victim felt about the strongest at death—something she didn't know was possible until coming to this world.

This mechanic, which was never a part of the game, was both convenient and anxiety-inducing. It proved their knowledge of the game and its rules might not apply to this world, potentially shattering any bearing the game settings might have.

Takuto had this niggling feeling the world was telling him this was reality, not a game, but he ignored it and turned his attention toward other things. He preferred to think about Qualia's Northern Disturbance and the Witches said to be causing it. *Those two things should be given priority.*

How will this uncertain event affect our country? And if Qualia should fall, isn't it our turn next? And before that happens, is there really no chance Qualia won't set its sights on us when their scouts don't come back?

Various concerns flooded Takuto's thoughts and jumbled together.

"We're fortunate Qualia's military is preoccupied fending off the mayhem in their Northern Province," Atou said. "It lessens the chances of them sending a large army this far south."

"They only sent two black sheep Paladins to investigate with the hopes of snuffing them out if there really was something here... huh?"

"I would say so..."

"It's crippling when you have just as many enemies on the inside, isn't it?"

The information Paladin Verdel had was quite useful, albeit scarce.

It turned out that because their empire had a provincial system, there was fierce competition between provinces, and they constantly tried to outshine each other. Furthermore, they had a slow decision-making process brought about by the complicated political systems often found in bloated governments.

The Saint's prophecy predicted an omen of apocalypse in the Accursed Lands. Still, Qualia didn't want to take it seriously because if they actually confirmed it was true, the nation would fall into chaos trying to handle it. Hence they carried out the investigation in secret.

I don't know who made that decision, but it was criminally stupid.

Takuto was exasperated by the flaws in their organizational system, but he shook his head, realizing it must have been unavoidable in order to maintain such a huge empire.

“We are all united by our loyalty to you, King Takuto. You needn’t worry about similar problems arising in our empire.”

“Thanks.”

It was also true that the existence of the Witches and the other problems Qualia had put Mynoghra in a favorable position. By devoting its manpower to the Northern Province turmoil, Qualia gave Mynoghra more time to grow.

Perhaps they should be grateful for that.

It was disturbing that the other good civilization, the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals, was keeping quiet, but at least their unwillingness to move unless moved against also worked in Takuto’s favor.

He had a lot of concerns for the future, but Takuto felt it was better to have killed the reconnaissance team than to allow them safe passage after botched peace negotiations.

The longer they stayed hidden, the greater the advantage they had. He hoped they could avoid being detected until he could make at least one more Hero.

...He felt no pity whatsoever for those who’d died.

“Um, King Takuto—”

“Did you obtain any information on the Witches?”

Atou was about to ask him something when he cut her off. He was too absorbed in thought to hear her.

Of course, Takuto always came first for her. If the King had a question, she had no reason not to answer it. Even if she wouldn’t get another opportunity to ask the question she’d struggled to work up the courage to ask him.

“Unfortunately, there was little information about the Witches...but I learned they’re causing wide-spread military-scale damage to the Qualian army and cities and the name of one of the two known to exist.”

“There’s *two*?”

According to the information obtained from the High Paladin, two Witches had been confirmed so far in the Holy Kingdom of Qualia. Takuto couldn’t help but be surprised that they’d already caused extensive damage, but he was more concerned about their identities.

What kind of beings were these Witches who were regarded in the same light as Atou?

Taking the information she gleaned from Paladin Verdel's memories, Atou bitterly uttered the name of the one causing her king worry.

"Erakino the Slurping Witch is her name."

What did her title imply?

Obviously, it represented the Witch's abilities in some way, and it couldn't mean anything good, that was certain. It also marked her as evil, which Takuto already assumed.

"There could be more people like us..."

The Northern Disturbance seemed to have started recently. In fact, there wasn't even a hint of it before the Dark Elves were expelled from their country.

The timing overlapped with Takuto and Atou's arrival.

In other words, it strangely coincided with when Mynoghra came into this world.

Other forces had arrived when they did...

Apprehension crossed Atou's face. After all, if her assumption was right, then they'd be in a terrible situation.

"How do you wish to proceed, my liege? They might be friendlier toward us if they're also evil-aligned..."

"Hm... I get the feeling we won't be able to get along," Takuto calmly deduced while rubbing his chin.

"S-Same here..."

Atou nodded uncomfortably; she had to agree with Takuto on that one. How could she not when all the evil beings they knew of held to ideologies that made it impossible for them to see eye to eye with anyone else?

"Evil beings are crazy, after all... And most of them want to end the world, right? What good comes of that?! It's game over! Stop doing things without thinking about the consequences, evil!"

"D-Destroying themselves in the process is generally their reason for doing it."

"I'm sick of hackneyed villains!"

"I couldn't agree more..."

Evil beings don't get along on a fundamental level. As a group, they lack cooperation and don't care for others. Their subordinates and citizens are typically just pawns to achieve their goals, and

other empires are their enemy regardless of alignment.

Sure, there might be exceptions to the rule, but they are few and far between.

In the end, whether they were good or evil, they'd become like water and oil with Mynoghra, who preferred more peaceful solutions.

"The question is: is it a civilization from *Eternal Nations* that's controlling the Witch in the Northern Province?"

"Every civilization's Heroes in *Eternal Nations* are a force to be reckoned with. If *they* enter the picture, the world will inevitably be plunged into chaos," Atou said forebodingly.

"Even if it's not them, it's almost guaranteed these Witches have Hero-class combat skills... What a *pain*."

"While there are various factors at play, she's still a being capable of suppressing a large empire's armed forces. Just thinking about it makes me uncomfortable. I want us to have some more Heroes as soon as possible."

They were going to butt heads eventually. Takuto was sure of it.

Our objective is to make Mynoghra prosper. I won't make the first move. But there's a chance they might force my hand.

It was only natural to assume outside forces with policies that clashed with his would come up against them.

They might not have much time.

Takuto heaved a heavy sigh over these unamusing world affairs.

"I guess I should start considering other Heroes aside from Isla too. Maybe we should go with a strong combat unit instead."

"We almost have enough Mana to produce one more Hero... But the necessary Mana and Technology Level go up with every Hero. I also believe we should revisit our options."

Various Resources, Mana, and a specific Technology Level are required to produce a Hero.

Takuto had found a way to prepare the necessary costs to create an additional Hero, but they needed a whole lot more time to add more than one to their ranks right now. In other words, they had to be prudent in choosing their next Hero.

Summoning Isla, a Hero who made life more convenient but lacked strength, could put them into an early game checkmate.

Takuto bitterly remembered the time he was playing the game

when the large number of Larva produced by Isla was wiped out in a single turn by the enemy Hero's magic.

Saints and Witches...

He needed to tread carefully.

So, he'd decided to make use of the preliminary measures he'd put in place to deal with various situations and to make big changes to those measures in the process.

"Let's be flexible with our strategies. We should occasionally change our plans to meet the situation—and with that said, I want to make a slight alteration to one of our initial policies."

"All right. What would you like altered?"

"My policy on allies. I want to make at least one ally in case things go south."

"What?! You *want* allies? ...Is that even *possible* for us?"

Atou was right to be surprised.

It was a perfectly reasonable empire-management strategy, but not an easy one for Takuto to pull off with his inability to communicate. Not to mention the difficulties presented by Mynoghra being evil.

To be honest, she couldn't see it working.

"It will if it benefits the other empire. Obviously, we'll be limited to neutral nations..."

"Hmm, you mean the empire near our forest? I suppose their stance will have to change if the world around them is..."

"We won't know unless we try."

There was a Human city near the Cursed Sea of Trees. They needed to investigate them further, but they might be able to join forces if the situation called for it.

Mynoghra's first impression wasn't going to be pretty, but as long as they weren't an empire dead set on hegemony, negotiations should be possible. Various Resources, Materials, and Goods could become available through trade with them as well. Mynoghra had things they could offer in return too.

If any emergencies came up, they could also cooperate in striking down their enemies together.

Takuto decided on his future policies while carefully analyzing his mind's game map. His plan was a gamble that risked his negotiating partner becoming an enemy, but if they succeeded, they could better entrench themselves in this region.

It may be better to take a slightly aggressive stance here. That was

Takuto's call.

"Then I will summon the Dark Elves and urgently hammer out the details with them."

Atou took action according to his orders. Following the rule of striking while the iron was hot, she took her leave from Takuto and headed to town.

After encouraging her, Takuto stared into empty space atop his stone throne, all alone in the Palace's planned construction site. No emotion crossed his face as he sat in silence.

Eterpedia



Witch

Unit Type

Idoragya's Seven Apocalypse-
Bringing Evil **Witches**:

Sludge **Witch** Atou

Slurping **Witch** Erakino

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Description

Witches are special units. Only 7 can exist in the world at the same time and they all start with powerful skills and combat strength.

In addition, **Witch** units often have the ability to debuff enemy units, and the presence of a large army or another **Witch** or Saint is essential for their defeat.

They cannot be respawned, so carefully managing them is key to winning the game.

The currently known **Witches** are listed above.



<The Holy Kingdom of Qualia, Northern Province Evacuated Region>

WIND violently blew and snow danced. Every exhalation came out in white puffs and the freezing air mercilessly robbed the body of heat.

Mysterious cries echoed and drowned each other out in the distance.

Screams. Roars. Swears. Deranged laughter.

Saint Soalina of Blooming Burials quietly inquired of the situation as her superhuman hearing picked up on the sounds of the mad and deranged rioting in a distant city.

“Is there any movement from the Witch Erakino?”

“She settled in the city she conquered the other day and hasn’t moved since,” answered the High Paladin who served as her guard.

The Cardinal, who oversaw the Northern Province and carped on her actions, had already escaped far away.

Erakino the Slurping Witch’s campaign of terror grew in intensity with each day—as did the trouble they had with her slurped victims.

As she listened to the Paladin’s report, Soalina gnawed her lip, frustrated for having fallen behind while dealing with the Mabeasts and Demi-humans wreaking havoc in every section of the Northern Province to divide her armies.

“The Veiled Saint has deployed to the front lines. Her Miracle seems to be a good counter against the Witch, keeping them at a stalemate for the time being.”

Soalina thought of the Saint who always covered her face with a veil and kept her head down. She’d barely spoken to the girl whose background she didn’t know, but she had a greater affinity for her as a fellow Saint than she did for others. She offered a silent prayer of thanks and encouragement for her still being alive and for keeping the Witch at bay.

But a Saint is only one person. There’s only so much one person can do. And they took too long to act.

“Have they calculated the damages yet?”

“Two Northern Province cities have been decimated, along

with too many villages and small towns to count. Roughly 30,000 members of the Northern Army were annihilated by the Witch's hand. Civilian casualties are too great to even estimate..."

Soalina silently closed her eyes and apologized to those she couldn't save. They wouldn't come back no matter how much she apologized. She had become a Saint because she wanted to save everyone, yet they all slipped through her fingers like water.

The shadows grew deeper on her pale face.

"What about the Dark Continent omen— No, never mind. We can't afford to look away from our immediate crisis."

A reconnaissance team had been sent to investigate the Dark Continent's Accursed Lands based on her prophecy. Soalina had been informed that they hadn't found anything. She was suspicious when the Cardinal dodged her request for more information. But she couldn't let that distract her now.

Two Saints remained in the Holy Capital in case something went wrong. Soalina concentrated on the problem before her, determined to fulfill her duties.

"I want to leave subjugating the rest of the Mabeasts and Demi-humans scattered around the area to the Paladins. I will head to the front lines and aid the Veiled Saint. We may not be able to defeat the Witch, but we will force her from this land."

"Please wait, Saint Soalina! You need the Cardinal's permission to fight on the front lines—" the High Paladin hastily called after her as she stepped away.

The physical abilities of a Saint far exceed that of the High Paladins.

If she went alone, Soalina could run straight to the front lines in a few hours. Of course, she couldn't bring anyone with her.

"No need. It's my decision."

A sudden strong gust whipped by, causing the High Paladin to stumble a few steps backward as a cloud of snow blinded him. By the time he shook the snow off and opened his eyes, there wasn't even a shadow of the Saint left in sight.



<El-Nah Alliance of Elementals, Tetrarchy Council Meeting Chamber>

THE leaders of the various clans of the Elven alliance gravely surrounded a round table located in the chamber where they made the most important decisions.

An Elf read a report to the council with a grim face. He was a promising young man permitted there to gain experience for his role as a future clan chief.

“We have lost contact with Weiss-Nah, the chief city of the Toweiss clan. The ultimatum from that city is the same as the other fallen cities, and information from our Scouts proves it. They have changed sides.”

“AGAIN?! The entire Toweiss clan has joined the enemy now!” yelled the clan chief known for his short temper as he slammed his fist on the table.

Even if the others didn’t take it out on the furniture, they expressed the same feeling through groans, scowls, and crossed arms.

“If I may be so bold to offer a suggestion to you who have been blessed by the Elementals? How about we ask for aid from the Holy Kingdom of Qualia? You may take these as the words of a youngster who doesn’t know his place, but I believe this situation is beyond us...”

“Hogwash! I don’t care how long we’ve been allies with Qualia for, we can’t share the pathetic situation we find ourselves in with *them!*”

“Our many years as allies is *exactly* why we shouldn’t! Upon our pride as Elves blessed by the Elementals, we must solve this problem on our own.”

The words of each council member were absolute. They might hear you out, but their opinions weren’t easily changed.

The other chiefs seemed to be of the same mind as the first two to speak up.

An Elf’s wisdom and power grows with age. That usually benefits their fellow Elves, but sometimes their pride becomes so bloated, it blinded them to the big picture.

The young Elf quietly hung his head and withdrew his suggestion.

“Besides, Qualia is currently occupied with the Witch who appeared in the North. It should be us who wrap up our stupid problems first and sends them aid! Either way, your suggestion won’t work.”

“Hear, hear! Just imagine what will happen if news leaks to the other nations! Historians will have a field day mocking our alliance in future history books! Dammit! Curse those evil cretins... *Aahhh!* Just talking about it makes me sick!”

“Deploy the Saints! *And* the Elemental Champions! We need to clean up this inferior problem now!”

The council meeting once more ended in a clamor of voices.

They had, at last, decided to deploy El-Nah’s Saints. A single Saint with the strength to overpower a whole army would surely be able to overturn the loss of one clan’s capitulation.

But for some reason...the young future chief was worried that this problem might be the precursor to something bigger.



<The Dark Continent, Ancestral Spirit and Demi-human Empire of Phon’kaven >

PHON’KAVEN was a neutral nation existing on the Dark Continent. In this empire where various Beastmen, such as wolves, leopards, cows, and lizards lived, their forces were busy dealing with Barbarians who had invaded their territory for unknown reasons.

“Here comes an Ogre! Call for the Staff Holder!”

“Saints! Just how many of ’em are there?! This is too much for the Self-defense Force to handle!”

An angry roar echoed as the Beastmen Soldiers complained.

Fending off today’s wave was an uphill fight even for Beastmen, who had more latent potential than ordinary Humans. They had already lost count of how many Barbarians they had slaughtered.

Initially, the Self-Defense Forces fought back the waves until they became overwhelmed and had to call in the empire’s dignitary and skilled Mage, the Staff Holder.

The moment the cudgel-wielding Ogre tried to charge their defenses, lightning had struck from the heavens and fried its giant body. The Beastmen howled cheers of victory after confirming the Ogre was reduced to a smoking pile of charred meat.

“Hell yeah! That’s what I’d expect of our great Staff Holder! Even ferocious monsters fall at your feet with a single spell!”

The old woman with a cow head returned to the city without sticking around long to receive the Self-Defense Forces' words of appreciation.

As he watched her go, an exhausted Wolfman complained to his comrades with a sigh.

"She looks like any other old hag, though. You gotta hate how she can look like that and still be ten times older and stronger than us."

"Watch out, she'll hear you! Anyway, let's get to clearing away that Ogre corpse. It'll only get worse if we leave it to rot."

"Yeah, I know... *Hm?* What's that?"

With the temporary reprieve from the Barbarian invasion, the Soldier thought he could finally relax for a moment, even on corpse cleanup duty. But then he saw something moving in the distance.

"Oh Saints, gimme a break already...more Barbarians? No, wait! What the hell is with those numbers?! Call the messenger! We need to get news of this back fast!"

The few blurred dots in the distance rapidly multiplied. Eventually, it became clearly visible as a large army—a Barbarian Horde.

Did the other Soldiers notice too? Things suddenly got a whole lot rowdier.

The Wolfman had just finished complaining to his comrades about how it had been a nastily long day. But the day was far from over.

"...What the hell is goin' on?"

A massive number of Barbarians had appeared as suddenly as fog rolling in over the hills. Eyes locked on the incoming threat, the Wolfman muttered more to himself than anyone in particular.



<The Dark Continent, Mynoghra's Palace Construction Site>

CONSTRUCTION of the different structures was steadily underway in the Accursed Lands. Most of the work was being done on Mynoghra's Palace.

With enemies on the horizon, it was a problem if the symbolic building that showed the empire's power remained a temporary shack. Moreover, the Palace provided various buffs and bonuses, so

its construction took precedence, even from an empire-management viewpoint.

Completing the housing and Food Production facilities also allowed the Dark Elves to work day and night on it, rejoicing that they could finally create a place for their King to live.

Most of the foundation had been assembled, giving it shape. Every corner was decorated by the colorful floor coverings and wall hangings woven by the Dark Elf women, and it was expected to be a magnificent building once completed

Sitting on top of the same stone dais in his new throne room, Takuto quietly hummed, enjoying the tranquility of the night and the warm light of the torches.

“...King Takuto, may I have a moment of your time?”

A voice suddenly spoke beside him. He glanced to his side, and his eyes met with his trusted confidant Atou.

I was only able to get this far because I had her. Because of Atou, we were able to make this empire proposer without any major issues.

Takuto answered her with a smile as he was flooded by emotion.

“Hm? What is it?”

“You were just an ordinary citizen before coming here, right?”

“About as ordinary as you can get! Well, my family had *some* money, but I was still an average Joe! Where did that question come from? You always ask funny things, Atou.”

Takuto more or less came from humble origins. He had commoner sensibilities and shared the same ethics as everyone else from his country. He suddenly came to another world and suffered the shocking fate of having to run an empire like a computer game, but he was like any other modern Earth man at his core—that was how he viewed himself.

Any normal person would be running around like a chicken with its head cut off in the same position. Aren't I doing surprisingly well as king under these circumstances? He leaned into his self-evaluation with joy and excitement. *But since Atou asked about my upbringing, does that mean I'm still lacking as king?*

Takuto peered into Atou's eyes, quietly seeking the answer.

Atou made up her mind to put the same question to him she had failed to ask the other day.

“Ah, no! It's nothing like that! ...Um, I was just wondering if I offended you in any way by killing those Paladins...”

“Why would *that* offend me?”

Atou didn't have the answer to that question. She never expected him to ask her why.

Takuto could see the nitty-gritty details of the battle through their mental link. Everything that'd happened, from tearing them apart to crushing their bones to the moment she'd played with them before ending their lives.

Atou had prepared several excuses for why she'd enjoyed herself a little too much during battle. She had prepared her apologies for when he accused her of being inhumanely cruel.

But she didn't anticipate being asked why it should bother him.

Takuto should've been a normal person before coming to this world. As such, he should have normal ethics, and Atou believed she'd inherited some of those ethics from him. That's why she was even proud that she could walk the same path as Takuto despite being inherently evil.

But Takuto had just shattered that theory without realizing it.

He asked why he should be bothered in a situation where a normal person would at least be a little shaken, if not experiencing a total mental breakdown.

Atou felt like she was being consumed by the stare of a disturbing presence. She didn't know right from wrong anymore.

She was tormented by the inexplicable fear that Takuto's arrival in this world had changed his very nature. She was haunted by the horrifying thought that he was being affected by the traits granted to him as Mynoghra's commander, and the nice boy who kindly talked to her through the screen was going to go away forever.

“Silly, Atou.”

“Oh, I-I'm sorry...”

But then Atou realized those concerns were entirely her mistake. She remembered she knew nothing about Takuto Ira beyond their time together playing the game. She couldn't continue to express her doubts anymore.

“Is something worrying you? Let me know if there's anything I can do to help!”

“It's all right. I seemed to have been under some kind of misunderstanding...”

“I see... Um, is it just me, or are you depressed? I don't want

to see you like that. I want you to always be your cheerful self.”

Takuto gently took hold of Atou’s hand and wrapped it in his own, like a parent trying to warm their child’s hands up. His hands felt warm. His smile was full of affection.

And yet his words almost sounded like an absolute order...

“C’mon, smile! Smile!”

“O-Okay!” Atou hastily responded.

She smiled awkwardly, forgetting that she was a Hero with the potential to destroy the world. Her smile was far from perfect as her lips twitched at the corners, but Takuto seemed pleased enough.

Relieved, Atou was trying to make peace with the indescribable fear welling up in her when a hand rested on her head. Of course, it was Takuto’s. He was looking at Atou with the kindest, most loving expression. His tender feelings were conveyed to her through it.

Happiness rushed through her, pushing out all worries and doubts and filling her with relief and trust. Before she knew it, Atou was resting her face on Takuto’s chest, and she quietly enjoyed its comfort.

The veil of darkness fell over them, and only the sound of the crackling torches could be heard.

My relationship with Takuto will have to be settled some day, Atou thought. Why did he come to this world? Why am I, a supposed game character, here with him?

The answers to those questions had yet to show themselves.

But if she could be permitted to wish it—

“I’m sure we have a lot of trouble ahead of us, but I know I can make it through if I’m with you. So please, stay with me.”

“Me too. I feel the same way as you, King Takuto.”

—she hoped their time together like this would continue forever.

Forever and ever.

Together with her Takuto, who she loved and revered.

She prayed unceasingly for their time together to continue without end.

“I’ve gotta say, things are getting interesting! Let’s enjoy ourselves, okay?”

“A-As you command, my king...”

Her beloved king offered her words that were cheerful and encouraging.

But, in this moment, Atou could only see Takuto as a shadowy figure, shrouded in pure darkness.

Volume 1: End

SYSTEM MESSAGE

Event Chain "The Beginning of the End" has begun.

■■■■■■■■ the map.

~ Good civilizations, believe in God and resist the end.

~ Evil civilizations, overrun the world as you desire.

OK



Afterword

THANK you for reading this far. I'm the author, Fehu Kazuno.

What did you think of *Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra*'s official release? I originally wrote and uploaded this story to the Japanese user-generated novel publishing website *Shōsetsuka ni Narō*, where it was picked up and published by the GC Novels imprint.

The biggest changes from the web novel version are the extra scenes added to make the story longer and better. In addition to those new scenes, illustrator Jun drew pictures that perfectly capture the story's atmosphere. I am confident even fans of the original web novel will enjoy the series all over again in this form.

I hope you enjoyed this powered-up version of *Mynoghra*!

Next, I want to use this space to make a surprise reveal about something just as amazing as *Mynoghra* getting officially published! You might already know this by the time you read this afterword, but *Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra* is also getting a manga version!

Yasaiko Midorihana is the mangaka in charge of bringing the series to life in manga form. I've already seen the character rough drafts, and all I can say is that these vivid characters have been expanded upon a hundred times more than I could've imagined as the author.

I will be sure to make any other exciting announcements on my Twitter, so look forward to it!

Now it may be a little early, but I would like to move on to acknowledgments.

To the illustrator Jun, thank you for drawing such marvelous illustrations. Your designs are accurate and intricate down to the minute details, and at the same time, the characters feel like they are going to move right off the page during the heated action scenes. Your style perfectly matches the story atmosphere and I remember being in perfect sync about wanting you for the job with the editor in charge during our first meeting. I knew my gut instinct was right after we started receiving the art drafts from you.

You perfectly captured Atou being adorably evil. And then

there's Takuto, who comes across as strong to everyone else when he really just can't communicate. Every other character you drew was exactly as I imagined them, and I can only describe them as perfect. I have renewed determination to create a series suitable for your illustrations so we can have a long working relationship from now on.

I also want to give a special thank you to Kishida from the band Kishida Kyoudan & the Akeboshi Rockets for his contribution to the paper wrapper. I'm so grateful to you for reading and tweeting about this series since its web novel days and that you gave us permission to use an excerpt from your review on the paper wrapper. I anxiously asked for permission alongside my editor, with us both thinking, "Should we just ask, expecting to be rejected?" So I was thrilled when we received permission!

To the designer, I want to say thank you for the wonderful book design. The parts of the story that couldn't be expressed as well with words alone, such as the Eterpedia entries, looked so much better in image format, increasing the overall appeal of the work.

To my proofreader, I want to say sorry. I always thought I was careful to avoid typos and grammatical errors, so every time you showed me a mountain of mistakes, I started sweating bullets. There were a lot of idioms I used wrong, so this was a good learning experience for me.

To the editor who contacted me about publishing this novel, the editor in charge of my series, and everyone in the editing department at GC Novels, thank you. I am deeply grateful you picked this story out of the many out there. I want to put everything I have into this series to meet your expectations.

To the countless others who worked on this novel—this work only made it into the greater world thanks to your contribution. I am eternally grateful for all your assistance.

Last but not least, I wish to address the readers. A novel can only come into existence with a story and readers. Without all of you, this work would have never been published. Your opinions, reviews, and encouraging words all give strength to authors and their stories.

I save all your fanart and get an extra boost of motivation when I look back at them and smile. I hope I can return the favor by making this series even more interesting for you.

I plan to thrill, surprise, and move you emotionally with the story going ahead, so please continue to support me. Once more, I say thank you. I excuse myself here, hoping we meet again in the next afterword.



cross infinite world



**AS THE VILLAINESS,
I REJECT THESE
HAPPY-BAD ENDINGS!**

STORY BY: IOTA AIUE
ILLUSTRATION BY: KUROYUKI
AVAILABLE NOW!

A romantic comedy oneshot about a villainess doing whatever it takes to stop the heroine from falling in love and dooming the world!

REINCARNATED AS THE LAST OF MY KIND

STORY BY: KIRI KOMORI
ILLUSTRATION BY: YAMIGO
AVAILABLE NOW!

An endearing slice of life fantasy light novel series about a nonhuman girl's journey to become an alchemist to repay the family who took her in!



**I REINCARNATED AS EVIL ALICE,
SO THE ONLY THING I'M
COURTING IS DEATH! VOLUME 1**

STORY BY: CHII KURUSU
ILLUSTRATION BY: MINATO YAGUCHI
AVAILABLE NOW!

A gothic romantic comedy where the reincarnated heroine's only way to survive this dark otome game is by not falling in love!

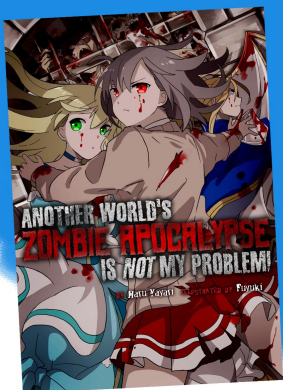


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ANOTHER WORLD'S ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE IS NOT MY PROBLEM!

STORY BY: HARU YAYARI
ILLUSTRATION BY: FUYUKI
VOL. 1 & 2 | OUT NOW

Just when I thought navigating high school was bad enough, I woke up to a rotting, post-apocalyptic world!

SINCE I WAS ABANDONED
AFTER REINCARNATING, I WILL
COOK WITH MY FLUFFY FRIENDS

STORY BY: YU SAKURAI
ILLUSTRATION BY: KASUMI NAGI
SERIES | VOL 1 OUT NOW

After being dumped by her fiancé and expelled from the kingdom, Laetitia decides to live her life in leisure, cooking for cute and fluffy mythical creatures!



THE WEAKEST MANGA VILLAINESS WANTS HER FREEDOM!

STORY BY: KAZUKI KARASAWA
ILLUSTRATION BY: MASAMI
STANDALONE | OUT NOW

Oh, crud, I just realized that I've been reincarnated into my favorite manga as the first boss defeated by the heroine at the start of the story!

